

OPEIU CONNECT

Issue 560, Spring 2025



STANDING TOGETHER



Moving Forward with Confidence

By Tyler Turner
President

In times of uncertainty and challenge it is natural to hold onto what we have, seeking comfort in the familiar rather than stepping forward with confidence. But history has shown progress is made not by standing still, but by pushing ahead, especially when the foundations we rely on seem shaken.

As a second-generation OPEIU member, I have seen firsthand the power of a strong union and the life it can provide. A close friend often describes OPEIU as a “fighting union that punches above its weight class,” and I could not agree more. Our resilience defines us, and we will continue to move forward. The commitments made at the 29th International Convention remain undeterred by the obstacles ahead.

The most effective response to the growing anti-worker agenda is clear: a strengthened commitment to organizing and building a movement led by our members. Now, more than ever, workers are turning to unions for protection, advocacy and a voice in the workplace. Under former President Richard Lanigan’s leadership, OPEIU built a dynamic and effective organizing program, and we are committed to expanding its reach. Thanks to the Apprentice Organizing Program, more OPEIU local unions than ever have dedicated staff organizers ready

to mobilize at a moment’s notice. Our union has also refined best practices for winning contract campaigns, demonstrated by the strength and resilience of the Hawai’i Nurses’ Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50 and the OPEIU locals representing Kaiser Permanente health care workers, among many others.

This momentum is driving our nationally coordinated efforts to organize workers at the International Rescue Committee and among Video Relay Service Interpreters [read more about the interpreters’ organizing efforts on pg. 11]. If we are to meet our ambitious goal of growing OPEIU by 50 percent in the next decade, every local must reaffirm its commitment to dedicating at least 25 percent of its resources to organizing.

Beyond growing our ranks, OPEIU remains unwavering in its commitment to racial and social justice unionism. While some employers and organizations retreat from their commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion, we are steadfast in our resolve. The fight for social, economic, gender and racial justice is more urgent than ever, and we will not allow those who seek to divide us to succeed. OPEIU is a union for all, and we will continue working to ensure every member has a path to leadership and an equal voice in shaping our future.

The road ahead will require courage, persistence and unity. Together, we will meet the moment. Through organizing, advocacy and unwavering solidarity we will continue building a stronger, more inclusive and more powerful OPEIU.

“OPEIU is a union for all, and we will continue working to ensure every member has a path to leadership and an equal voice in shaping our future.”



Tyler Turner is sworn in as OPEIU president by Secretary-Treasurer Mary Mahoney.

Tyler Turner Named OPEIU President

Tyler Turner has been named OPEIU president by the union’s executive board, effective Feb. 19, following the retirement of former President Richard Lanigan. He serves alongside OPEIU Secretary-Treasurer Mary Mahoney.

Turner has been president of Local 277 (Region IV) in Fort Worth, Texas, since 2017 and an OPEIU vice president for Region IV since 2019. “I would like to thank the executive board for its decision to appoint me as president,” said Turner, who will serve the unexpired term until June 2027 when the next election will be held. “I am humbled by its faith in me and pledge to the members my dedication to serving them and advocating for the rights and dignity of all working people across the country. I am fully committed to continuing our mission to grow and strengthen our union through organizing and community activism. I look forward to working with our members, local unions, Secretary-Treasurer Mahoney and the executive board to achieve these goals.”

“We are confident Tyler Turner is the right choice to lead our union through the next challenging years as we face a hostile anti-worker administration,” the executive board said in a statement. “Tyler has the experience and vision needed to ensure OPEIU can weather these challenges, find new and innovative approaches to organizing in our industries and, ultimately, work to ensure our members enjoy the dignity and respect they deserve in their workplaces.”

As the son of Becky Turner, OPEIU vice president emerita and former Local 277 president, Tyler Turner was introduced to labor activism at a young age. He began attending membership meetings at eight weeks old and quickly grew to realize that Local 277 members would be his lifelong family.

Upon going to work for Kaiser Permanente’s Consolidated Service Center in Fort Worth, Turner joined Local 277 in 2007. Soon after becoming a member, he realized his passion for labor activism and went to work directly for the local as support staff. He began his training by working side-by-side with Local 277 Business Representative Chuck Tyler, supporting members working for the City of Fort Worth and becoming active in the Tarrant County Central Labor Council (TCCLC).

In 2011, Turner was promoted to business representative for Local 277 and began representing members working for American Income Life Insurance Company across the United States and New Zealand. That same year he was elected to the TCCLC Executive Board as a member at large, where he served on various committees and now serves as a trustee.

After serving on the bargaining committees with members working for Lockheed Martin, American Income Life, National Income Life and numerous other bargaining units, Turner was appointed to the Local 277 Executive Board as recording secretary. In 2013, he was promoted to senior business representative and elected as a District 8 vice president for the Texas AFL-CIO.

He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington with a BBA in finance. He has two children and future labor activists, Hadyn and Cadence.

The executive board has also bestowed president emeritus status to Lanigan, who retires after 45 years of dedicated service to OPEIU.

APALA Seeks Ways to Best Represent Members as Immigrant Rights are Under Attack



Members of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) National Executive Board, including OPEIU representative Aina Iglesias, fourth from left, met in December in Los Angeles to discuss key strategies for growth and better representation of union members at a time when many rights of immigrant communities are under attack. “Bridging the gap between unions and Asian American, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities remains a top priority for APALA to ensure these members are informed and active in the labor movement,” said Iglesias. APALA is a constituency group of the AFL-CIO.

INSIDE



On our cover: By mobilizing and standing together in solidarity, almost 400 Local 6 (Region II) nurses at Rutland Regional Medical Center in Vermont secured a 20 percent wage increase in their new three-year contract. Facing an uncertain economic future, Rutland nurses organized a Day of Action to help win the contract, proving what can be accomplished when working people band together and demand their rights at the bargaining table. Read more in the cover story, “Organized and Mobilized, Rutland Nurses Secure Contract with 20% Wage Increase,” on pg. 12.

OPEIU CONNECT
 Official Organ of
**THE OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES
 INTERNATIONAL UNION**
 affiliated with the AFL-CIO, CLC
 opeiu.org

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OPEIU CONNECT (ISSN 2771-6597) is published quarterly by the Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 Eighth Avenue, Suite 201, New York, NY 10011. Periodical postage paid at New York and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Office and Professional Employees International Union, P.O. Box 1761, New York, NY 10113.
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 Subscription Price: \$1 a Year

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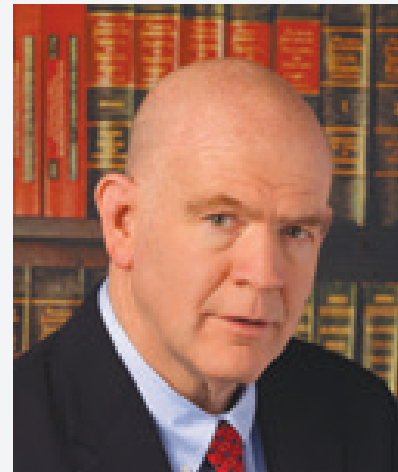
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Former President Richard Lanigan Retires

After 45 years of service to OPEIU, including the past nine as president, Richard Lanigan retired and was granted president emeritus status by the OPEIU Executive Board.



Richard Lanigan

“It has been the honor and privilege of my life to serve this union and the members of OPEIU, especially during the past years as president,” Lanigan said. “I am proud to have been part of the union’s refocus on organizing the unorganized in our industries, and of our progress finding new ways to ensure retirement security and crucial benefits for OPEIU members. Mostly, I am pleased to hand the reins to new president Tyler Turner, who I am confident will ensure our union continues to be a strong and powerful advocate for working people.”

Lanigan was first elected to serve as president at the 27th International Convention in June 2016 and was re-elected in 2019 and 2023.

A Life Dedicated to OPEIU

After working his way through college as a union member, Lanigan joined Local 153 (Region II) in New York City as an organizer in 1980. In 1987, he enrolled in law school as an evening student and upon admission to the bar served for a time as assistant to the OPEIU general counsel. In 1994, he was elected secretary-treasurer of Local 153, where he directed day-to-day operations of OPEIU’s largest local union and bargained hundreds of contracts. He also served on the International union’s executive board from 1994 until his elevation to president in 2016.

He represented OPEIU in jurisdictional disputes under Article XX of the AFL-CIO Internal Disputes Procedure, winning many decisions, including the Hawai’i Nurses’ Association case in 2010 that solidified the affiliation of 4,000 nurses with OPEIU.

During his tenure as president, Lanigan made revitalizing local union organizing one of the union’s top priorities, bringing thousands of new members into more than 20 different local unions. This was accomplished while initiating new benefit plans for OPEIU and its members, including a national retirement plan that has grown to more than 1,700 participants and nearly \$100 million in assets.

“OPEIU and its members are forever indebted to Richard for his many contributions to the union during his 45 years of dedicated service,” Turner said. “His vision and innovative approach to organizing have ensured OPEIU is strong and ready to meet any challenges that come our way.”

*“It has been the honor and privilege
of my life to serve this union
and the members of OPEIU ...”*

Why Do So Many Americans Pass Up Bigger Social Security Checks?

By Peter Coy, *The New York Times*

People get just 70 percent of their full Social Security benefit if they claim at 62, the full benefit at 67 and 124 percent of the benefit if they claim at 70. The gain from waiting is so big that it pays for most people to keep working, or even to dip deep into their retirement savings early to cover their expenses so they can delay claiming.

A 2022 study found that “virtually all” American workers then in the 45-to-62-year-old age group should wait beyond age 65 to start collecting Social Security checks. It said that more than 90 percent should wait till age 70, yet only 10 percent appeared to do so. Many started collecting checks on the first date they were eligible, once they turned 62.

To put it bluntly, people are making expensive choices. “The median loss for this age group in the present value of household lifetime discretionary spending is \$182,370,” the researchers found. For that amount of money, you could almost buy a Mercedes AMG-S63. Or, alternatively, pay a few medical bills. (The math for delaying benefits isn’t quite as favorable now as it was in 2022, when that “virtually all” study came out, because of a rise in the interest rate that goes into the calculation.)

I’m interested in two things. One is why people make this choice when it is so often a mistake. The other is why our system makes it so easy for them to make this mistake. I feel about premature claiming the same as I feel about state-run lotteries, which prey on the desperate and the dreamers. I don’t claim early and I don’t buy lottery tickets. The mistakes other people make indirectly benefit me by decreasing payments and thus my tax burden, and that seems unfair.

A caveat: Delaying claiming isn’t right for everyone. If you are in poor health or have other reason to think you’ll die young, grab the government’s money while you can. Likewise if you fear you’ll have to declare bankruptcy unless the checks start coming. A report last year by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities said that about 40 percent of people in their early 60s reported a disabling condition and that about 40 percent of recent retirees reported being forced out of work. For some such people, claiming Social Security early may be unavoidable.

That said, many other retirees can wait but don’t. Suzanne Shu of Cornell has done deep research on the psychology of early claiming. She told me that a lot of people, when surveyed in their 50s, said they planned to claim late, understanding that the monthly benefit is higher for late claimers. But as age 62 approached, they crumbled.

“It’s a bit like having a chocolate chip cookie in front of you on the table,” she said.

The people who are most likely to crumble are those who perceive the benefit as a kind of possession, as opposed to a government benefit that’s paid mostly out of the payroll taxes on current workers, she and John Payne of Duke found in a paper last year.



“Social Security is a program that most American workers think they already have as an endowment. They want it as soon as they can get their hands on it,” she said.

People with a high degree of loss aversion are also likely to claim early, Shu and Payne found. That’s counterintuitive, because by claiming early and getting smaller checks, they lock in a lifetime loss. But that’s not how the early claimers see things, Shu, who has a doctorate in behavioral science, told me.

People who are loss-averse feel the pain of a loss more acutely than they feel the pleasure of an equal or even bigger gain. A highly loss-averse person frets about losing benefits by postponing claiming and then dying earlier than expected. That potential loss looms larger for the person than the more likely outcome of bigger checks over a normal life span.

Nudges to get people to claim later can cause them to claim even earlier, previous research found. For example, telling people how many years they need to live to do better by delaying claiming may cause many to fixate on the risk of an early demise. Graphing the benefits of delaying claiming doesn’t help either, another study found.

In a journal article last year, Shu and three other researchers tested 13 interventions. The ones that worked got people to focus on behavioral norms, the possibility of feeling regret in the future from claiming too early, the benefits to one’s future self from claiming later and the risk of living long and therefore needing the biggest checks possible.

I salute Shu and her fellow academics for trying to help. But the problem they’re trying to solve would be smaller if the Social Security formula was changed to make it truly actuarially fair — that is, with a reduced penalty for claiming early and a smaller benefit for claiming late. Rising longevity spoiled the original formula because the bigger checks from delaying started lasting longer when people started living longer, making a delay in claiming ever more attractive.

In a statement to me for this newsletter, a Social Security Administration spokesperson wrote that the terms “were enacted by Congress in 1983” based on expectations for longevity and interest rates and can be changed only by another act of Congress.

One possibility is to drop the concept of actuarial fairness and focus instead on income adequacy. A 2014 study published by the Social Security Administration found that one small tweak — namely, increasing the financial advantage of delaying claiming by one year, from 62 to 63 — could make a meaningful difference in people’s behavior. More than that could be done.

If you’ve read this far, there’s a good chance you’re one of those people thinking of delaying claiming Social Security benefits past your full retirement age or have already done so. Congratulations. But spare a thought for people your age who didn’t or couldn’t wait.



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A 2022 study found that “virtually all” American workers then in the 45-to-62-year-old age group should wait beyond age 65 to start collecting Social Security checks.



Study: 4 in 5 with Autoimmune Disorders are Women

A recent study published by an international team of research scientists based at Stanford Medicine sheds light on why women are more prone to autoimmune disorders.

Between 24 and 50 million Americans have an autoimmune disease, according to the study, and as many as four in five of those people are women. Disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis and lupus all have lopsided gender ratios.

Researchers at Stanford Medicine have traced this disparity to a process called “X-chromosome inactivation.” During embryogenesis — when a fertilized egg develops into an embryo — each cell makes an “independent decision” to shut down the activity of one or the other of a female’s X chromosomes. This inactivation, researchers said, seems to play some role in developing autoimmune disorders.

The inactivation is caused by the presence of the Xist (pronounced “exist”) molecule, according to the study. Xist genes exist on all X chromosomes, even in males, but Xist itself is produced only in women. The inactivation process spurred by Xist produces irregular molecular complexes, which are linked to many autoimmune diseases.

Though it is not the only factor driving the development of autoimmune disorders, the discovery can help doctors better screen for and predict autoimmune disorders, many of which are without a cure, before they develop, researchers said.

Help Guard Your Online Identity with OPEIU’s Identity Protection Benefit

As part of your spring cleaning this year, make sure to include a check of your cyber hygiene as well! Taking advantage of OPEIU’s Identity Protection benefit, provided free to all members, is an easy way to enhance your cyber health and online safety.

Sharing data is now a daily fact of life, and as our digital footprint grows, so do our risks. Last year saw an unprecedented increase in both frequency and severity of data breaches. Hackers have become extremely sophisticated and have developed ways to compromise our identities in various ways. It is important to be vigilant and practice good cyber hygiene.

The OPEIU Identity Protection benefit, administered through industry leader, Identity IQ, is available at no cost to you and your family by visiting opeiuidprotect.com. Enrollment in the program is a quick, two-step process:

- Go to opeiuidprotect.com to create your username and password.
- You will then receive an email to authenticate.

In the event your personal information is found on the Dark Web, you will receive a Dark Web alert email from Identity IQ, with instructions and next steps to mitigate your exposure. If you are a victim of identity theft, the OPEIU Identity Protection benefit includes full-service remediation, credit monitoring and \$1 million of fraud expense reimbursement insurance, to name a few of the benefits. If your information is not found on the Dark Web, you will receive an all-clear email each month.



To learn more about the OPEIU Identity Protection benefit, visit opeiu.org and click the **Member Resources** tab or scan the QR code.

Graduate Degree Programs Now Available



A range of new degree programs, including graduate degrees, are now available through OPEIU’s Discount College benefit. Visit opeiu.org and click the **Member Resources** tab or scan the QR code to learn more.

100 Percent Participation is Always the Goal



By Jeff Wheeler
Senior Program Officer
Solidarity Center
Local 2 (Region II)
Washington, D.C.

As a steward, my goal is to always reach 100 percent participation. At the Solidarity Center, with skills I first developed as a steward at the National Democratic Institute, I never miss an opportunity to engage with my colleagues and turn every meeting into an organizing opportunity.

Learning to become an effective steward starts by listening. When I was elected steward last year, I was fortunate to have been able to learn from stewards past and present. They helped me understand the history of the contract and what had taken place behind the scenes. They offered a big picture view of where we were and where we are going. That experience was invaluable, and I encourage all new stewards to absorb as much information as they can from those who came before them.

Armed with that knowledge, I have been able to impart it to my colleagues, ensuring we are all on the same page long before we reach the bargaining table. Being an organizer is an essential element of being a good steward. We are stronger when we are all active and engaged, and I miss no opportunities to encourage members to get involved. By listening to members' issues and interests, I can make personalized appeals to help them get involved in ways that make sense for them. For example, a member interested in communication could be ushered into helping with membership outreach. A member with recurring issues related to a contract clause could be encouraged to join the bargaining team and speak on their own experiences at the table.

This philosophy also necessitates making the union a meaningful part of people's lives. We routinely organize happy hours, meetups and other events to build union power outside of the workplace. By doing so, we make clear the union is not just an organization; it is a community of workers committed to improving their own lives and those of their co-workers.

A steward is not just a person to go to with questions. Stewards are nation-builders. They get across what the union is here for, the issues we are fighting for and the issues on which we have had success. When a new hire comes on board it is critical for stewards to bring them up to speed and help build a culture of union participation as soon as possible. Bringing in trusted co-workers to participate in the new member orientation helps to establish connections, educate new members and explain the gains we have made by sticking together in and out of bargaining.

The Solidarity Center

The Solidarity Center is a nonprofit organization established by the AFL-CIO in 1997 with the mission to help build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent and democratic unions. It is the only U.S.-based group focused on global labor rights.

The Solidarity Center stands with working people across the world who face some of the toughest conditions — forced labor, violence and union busting. Their work is driven solely by the labor movement's shared mission of ensuring all workers have the right to organize, earn fair wages and work with dignity. Learn how you can stand with working people facing some of the world's toughest working conditions by visiting solidaritycenter.org.

ASL Interpreters, U.S. Rep. Greg Casar Call for Accountability in Deaf Telecommunications

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters working for Sorenson Communications and ZP Better Together hosted a press conference in late February as part of an ongoing national campaign to organize with OPEIU to improve working conditions in the Video Relay Service (VRS) industry. VRS is an essential service ensuring Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf-Blind people have functionally equivalent service under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Interpreters organizing with OPEIU were joined at the rally outside the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) by U.S. Rep. Greg Casar (D-Texas), a former union organizer who serves as chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Working closely with interpreters, Casar sent a letter in January to the FCC urging the agency to act on its duty to regulate the industry. In response, FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez agreed to hold a first-of-its-kind public forum for VRS interpreters and Deaf users to share their stories directly with FCC officials. Since then, dozens of congressional members signed a similar letter urging the FCC to closely scrutinize significant service quality issues such as burnout, inadequate training, the need for Certified Deaf Interpreters and persistent hardware and software problems in the industry.

"When unions organize and fight, and when these interpreters fight against the billionaires taking over your economy and your government, they're not doing it just for themselves. They're doing it for all of us," Casar said at the press event. "Even though they may have all this money, we actually have power."

The ASL Interpreters Union-OPEIU is organizing VRS interpreters at Sorenson Communications and ZP Better Together. Sorenson Communications is backed by investment firms Ariel and The Blackstone Group, while ZP Better Together, after years of private equity ownership, was recently purchased by French multinational Teleperformance. The FCC funds and supervises the VRS program, and can hold VRS firms accountable for service quality issues. OPEIU is seeking neutrality agreements from both firms allowing interpreters to organize free of management interference.

"For too long, private equity owners have pillaged VRS, extracting enormous profits while users suffer," said Meg Huseman, an ASL Interpreters Union-OPEIU leader at Sorenson Communications. "It's time we stand up and take action to ensure we are able to deliver the highest quality service, by ensuring VRS companies and their backers respect interpreters and the communities they serve."



U.S. Rep. Greg Casar (D-TX) stands in solidarity with ASL interpreters organizing the Video Relay Service industry with OPEIU. Meg Huseman, an ASL interpreter working at Sorenson Communications, addresses the rally at the Federal Communications Commission.

Organized and Mobilized, Rutland Nurses Secure Contract with 20% Wage Increase

By mobilizing and standing together in solidarity, almost 400 Local 6 (Region II) nurses at Rutland Regional Medical Center in Vermont secured a 20 percent wage increase in their new three-year contract.

Uncertain about their economic futures and faced with rising inflation, Rutland nurses organized and mobilized, culminating in a Day of Action in November.

“We felt we weren’t being heard during negotiations about what was important to our members,” said Karen St. Marie, RN, a steward at Rutland who served on the union’s bargaining committee.

Nurses, support staff, family members and community supporters gathered at a busy intersection near the hospital. Donning Local 6 T-shirts and carrying signs, nurses were able to raise awareness of their contract fight with the state’s largest community hospital.

The increased visibility and show of support during the Day of Action paid off. In the next bargaining session, an agreement was reached. “I believe the turnout on our Day of Action helped to show leadership that our members stood with the bargaining team,” St. Marie said.

The new contract comes on the heels of their last agreement, which delivered similar wage gains, marking an average 40 percent wage increase for Rutland nurses over six years.



Local 6 nurses at Rutland Regional Medical Center hold a Day of Action to help win their new contract.

Queen’s Nurses Ratify Historic Contract: ‘Huge Victory for Patient Safety’

Nurses at the Queen’s Medical Center in Honolulu ratified a three-year contract prioritizing patient safety and staff well-being following a difficult nine-month negotiation. The milestone agreement was reached after a strike threat by the nearly 2,000 nurses who are members of the Hawai’i Nurses’ Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50 (Region VIII). The strike was averted just hours before it was scheduled to begin, with management agreeing to nurses’ major demands.

The agreement includes enforceable safe staffing ratios for the second time in the state’s history, which is expected to protect patients by reducing each nurse’s patient load by up to three patients per shift, depending on the unit. Other highlights include an across-the-board 17 percent wage increase over three years, increases to on-call pay, an agreement to hire 30 new full-time nurses and improvements to paid time off.

“This has been a long, nine-month battle for patient safety, and the nurses now can have peace of mind that quality care will be a priority at Queen’s,” said Rosalee Agas-Yuu, RN, president of HNA and an OPEIU vice president. “The nurses feel much more confident that patients will receive the attention and care they deserve when they are admitted to Queen’s.”

Nurses had been working without a contract since their last agreement expired in June.

The new contract is the second in Hawai’i to include enforceable safe staffing ratios, following a victory by HNA nurses at Kapi’olani Medical Center for Women and Children last year. [See the Winter 2025 OPEIU Connect cover story, “Kapi’olani Nurses Win Historic Contract.”]

“Nurses fought to put patients first and won the best contract I’ve seen in my 15-year career at Queen’s,” said Lisa Haberman, an emergency department nurse, who was also part of the negotiating team.

HNA represents 4,000 health care workers employed at major providers throughout Hawai’i. HNA affiliated with OPEIU in 2010, becoming Local 50.



Local 50 nurses at the Queen’s Medical Center in Honolulu at an informational picket in July.



Standardized patients at a rally in July.

Jefferson Standardized Patients Ratify Historic Contract

Solidarity won the day as standardized patients at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia stood together against employer union-busting efforts to ratify their first union contract in February. The agreement, covering more than 65 trained actors who simulate real patients in medical settings, is the first of its kind for standardized patients at any university. They are represented by Local 32 (Region II).

The contract includes an immediate raise to \$24 an hour, a major priority for the standardized patients, who had not received a raise since 2008. Other highlights include an extra \$20 an hour for invasive procedures, guaranteed annual raises, cancellation pay and protections against discrimination.

“The thing I’m most proud of is we were able to get the hourly wages up,” said Andy Moholt, a standardized patient who served on the organizing committee. Hourly wages for standardized patients are now some of the highest in the city after more than a decade of stagnation.

Throughout the campaign for a contract, standardized patients held several rallies to draw attention to their fight for a first contract, while the university employed union-busting techniques, such as attempting to unfairly exclude certain job classifications from the unit. Because no standardized patients had ever unionized, bargaining necessitated the introduction of new language directly addressing the unique needs of these workers. “If you decide ahead of time that your job is impossible to unionize,” Moholt added, “you’ll be right.”

“If you’re a part-time worker, or if your job is niche, it doesn’t mean you don’t deserve a seat at the [bargaining] table,” he concluded.

North Arlington EMTs Have First Union and Contract

Borough employees in North Arlington, New Jersey, ratified a new three-year contract in December. The contract with Local 32 (Region II) covers police dispatchers, white collar employees and, for the first time, EMTs and paramedics.

The agreement includes cumulative raises of 15 percent, including 7.5 percent in the first year, and introduces parity in benefits among all groups covered by the contract.

James Bandeira, a paramedic in North Arlington, served on his union’s organizing and bargaining committee after signing up colleagues with Local 32 last year. Having been in a union twice at previous jobs, he felt the opportunity to join Local 32 could improve the lives of paramedics and EMTs in the small northern New Jersey borough.

“There were threats of being fired and, in our impression, a hostile work environment,” said Bandeira, who now serves as a union steward. “We were like ‘hey, the other half of the town is in a union. Why not us?’”

Bandeira collected cards from his colleagues and, a few months later, joined the bargaining committee. Given the hostile environment, securing just cause protections through a union contract was one of the most important issues to be solved by joining Local 32, he said. Addressing low wages was also a major priority for his colleagues, “especially when the things they’re exposed to — the stress, the loss of time with family — are considered.”

Joining a union creates “real power at work,” Bandeira said. “If you get enough like-minded individuals together, you can really change your workplace and improve people’s lives. I’m grateful to my co-workers, grateful to OPEIU and super excited for where we go from here.”



From left to right, Briana Mompellier, Michael Saggau, James Bandeira and Joseph Miller.

Defenders of Wildlife Staff Ratify First Contract

Staff at Defenders of Wildlife, an environmental justice nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., ratified their first union contract in December. The three-year contract includes an average wage increase of 14 percent over three years, with more than half of staff receiving market adjustments of up to 40 percent.

The agreement, covering more than 80 members with Local 2 (Region II), followed a two-day unfair labor practice strike at the environmental conservation nonprofit in July. That strike was spurred by management revoking annual raises for union members and refusing to bargain in good faith.

Christi Heun, the organization's senior representative in Alaska, said the strike was critical to reach a fair agreement. "There's nothing I've done with our union that has felt more powerful and meaningful than striking," she said. "It shows you that your voice does matter."

The contract includes several wins beyond wage increases: increased parental leave from two weeks to 12; remote-worker stipend increases; improvements to vacation leave; the establishment of a grievance procedure; and guardrails to protect against future layoffs.

Heun, a shop steward and bargaining committee member, said a major priority during negotiations was winning just cause protections. Two years ago, she said, management unceremoniously laid off several of her colleagues with no warning, just before the organization's Employee Appreciation Day. "It was a morale punch," she said.

But the union contract has transformed Defenders. The contract "represents wins we needed and also provides a fresh start with our management," she said. "Something that's really wonderful about our union is that we have a way better workplace culture now.

"I've known, since I've been here, a half-dozen people who've left because they didn't like the workplace culture," she said. "They felt like they didn't have good benefits, they weren't heard and felt disposable. Now it's the opposite. We've won great protections and benefits."



Staff at Defenders of Wildlife on the strike line in July.

Vancouver Housing Authority Workers Negotiate 22% Wage Increase

A supermajority of workers at the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA), represented by Local 11 (Region VI), voted to ratify a new three-year collective bargaining agreement in February.

The agreement covers more than 50 employees who help people access emergency shelters operated by partnering nonprofits, find permanent and supportive housing for people exiting homelessness and assist low-income renters in finding suitable homes.

The contract moves VHA to a more equitable pay structure, securing broad-based increases for all members, while shifting away from a "merit-based" pay structure to a step-based structure. This change counters the potential pitfalls of merit-based systems, which can be applied inequitably, creating wage disparities.

Other contract highlights include an increase in pay for staff who regularly use a second language at work, eight hours of bereavement leave, extra pay for taking on duties outside of usual roles and longevity bonuses.

Union members will receive total wage increases of 22 percent over the life of the three-year agreement.

"By securing a significant wage increase and a more equitable pay structure, this agreement helps our workers move closer to financial independence, empowering them to remain self-sufficient and reducing the likelihood they will rely on the services of the Vancouver Housing Authority in the future," said Cheyenne Russell, a Local 11 representative.



From left to right, retired Local 8 officers Suzanne Mode, Kellie McGuire and Cindy Schu with the newly elected President Sara Franklin and Business Manager Corinne Cosentino.

Corinne Cosentino Elected Local 8 Business Manager

Corinne Cosentino has been elected business manager of Local 8 (Region VI) in Seattle, following the retirement of longtime Business Manager Suzanne Mode.

In late January, Local 8 held its elections and ushered in a new slate of leaders. After 23 years serving as business manager, Mode retired. Likewise, Kellie McGuire stepped down after 15 years as president, creating the opportunity for Sara Franklin to step into the role.

"As we bid farewell to them in their current capacities, we want to express our deep appreciation for the exceptional leadership and guidance Suzanne and Kellie have provided during their tenure," the local said in a statement. "Under their stewardship, Local 8 has grown, becoming stronger and more democratic.

"We also want to enthusiastically welcome Corinne and Sara into their new roles," the local continued. "We look forward to the undeniable drive, vision and ideas they will bring to their respective positions. We are fortunate to continue to have such capable, strong women leading our union!"

Also elected were new executive board members who will continue Local 8's proud tradition of fighting for workers' rights and solidarity.

ULP Settlement Means Six-Figure Payouts to Former Employees of International Foundation for Electoral Systems

A recent settlement between the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and Local 2 (Region II) in Washington, D.C., has resulted in significant payouts to five former employees.

The settlement, reached in August, resolves 15 outstanding unfair labor practice charges filed against the pro-democracy nonprofit, where workers voted to form a union with Local 2 in July 2022. Via the terms of the settlement, IFES paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars to former employees, expunged their disciplinary records and posted written commitments throughout its offices to uphold U.S. labor law.

Notice to Employees Subject to Union Security Clauses

This notice is for all private sector workers in the United States working under an OPEIU contract containing a valid union security clause. Union security clauses require an employee to pay dues or other fees to a union as a condition of employment. The dues or fees amount you pay to OPEIU supports the costs of negotiating your contract and the broad range of activities we engage in to support you, your family and your co-workers.

Non-members may file objections to funding union expenditures that are not germane to collective bargaining, contract administration, or grievance adjustment (“chargeable expenditures”) and instead pay what is known as an agency fee. Examples of chargeable expenditures include: the costs of negotiations with employers; contract administration expenses; communication with employers regarding work-related issues; handling employees’ work-related problems through the grievance and arbitration procedure; and Union administration. Examples of non-chargeable expenditures include: expenses made for community services; expenses for political purposes; the costs of certain affiliation fees; and expenses for benefits available only to members and their families.

Note: The International Union’s J.B. Moss Voice of the Electorate (VOTE) fund is an independent, segregated fund that receives voluntary donations and contributes to political candidates who support the needs of working men and women. No money received from dues or fees goes to the VOTE fund. Accordingly, the VOTE fund is not considered in the calculation of the percentage of expenditures that is spent on non-chargeable expenses.

But if you choose not to join the union or if you resign your membership, and in either case file objections, the many rights and opportunities available to OPEIU members will not be available to you. For example, you will give up your ability to:

- Vote on terms of your contract;
- Participate in strike votes;
- Participate in the development of contract proposals;
- Nominate, vote for or serve as an officer of your local union or the International Union;
- Nominate, vote for or serve as a delegate to the International Convention; and

- Enjoy discounts and other benefits available only to members, including eligibility for OPEIU scholarships for you and your family.

Should you decide to give up all these rights and benefits and submit objections in accordance with the below procedure, you will receive a rebate of a portion of your dues or equivalent payments based on non-chargeable expenditures. In the past, approximately **34-40 percent** of the International Union’s expenditures have gone toward these activities. The percentages of local union expenditures on non-chargeable activities have generally been higher.

As you consider whether to object, you should remember the most important right you have at work is the right to be represented by a union. When workers negotiate together through the union and speak with one voice, they win higher wages and better benefits and achieve greater respect and dignity on the job than workers who do not have workplace representation. There is strength in numbers. The stronger your union is, the better your contract will be.

Objections Procedure

Individuals who choose to file objections must submit them in writing to the Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 8th Ave, Suite 205, New York, NY 10011, Attention: Mary Mahoney, Secretary-Treasurer. Objections should include the objector’s name, home address, employer and local union number.

Objections must be postmarked during the month of June. New hires who choose not to join the union may also submit their objections postmarked within thirty (30) days of being compelled to pay dues or fees to the union or within thirty (30) days of the new hire’s receipt of a new employee letter from a local union. Newly resigned members may also submit their objections postmarked within thirty (30) days from receipt by the union of the resigning member’s letter of resignation. All objections will be deemed continuing in nature unless or until the employee requests a change in status. Timely submitted objections will be effective on the first day of the month following the month in which the objections were received by the union.

Challenge Procedure

An objector may challenge the International Union’s and/or the local union’s classification or calculation of expenditures before a neutral

arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association pursuant to its Rules for Impartial Determination of Union Fees. Challenges may be coordinated or consolidated before a single arbitrator.

Objectors must submit written notification of any intended challenge to Mary Mahoney, Secretary-Treasurer, Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 8th Ave, Suite 205, New York, NY 10011. Notifications must be received by the secretary-treasurer within thirty (30) days of the challenger’s receipt of a letter from the local union informing the challenger of the amount of the rebate, the basis for the calculation, and the internal procedure for filing a challenge. That challenge should specify which classification and/or calculations of the International Union and/or local union are being challenged.

The union(s) shall bear the burden of justifying their classifications and calculations. If a hearing at which the parties or witnesses may be present is held by the arbitrator, it will be held at a location most convenient to the largest number of involved challengers. The cost of any arbitration proceeding will be paid for by the unions. Challengers, however, will not be reimbursed for lost time and will have to pay for their own travel expenses and the fees, costs and expenses of any persons they involve in the proceedings.

When a written challenge is received from an objector, the local union will place an amount equal to the challenged portion of the fee into an interest-bearing escrow account. It shall remain in that account until the appointed arbitrator issues a decision. Should the decision lower the percentage of chargeable expenditures to the challenger(s), the appropriate portion of the escrowed fees, plus the interest earned by that portion while in the escrow account, will be refunded. All objectors in each local union affected by the decision of the arbitrator will be responsible for the adjusted fee amount determined by the arbitrator. If the arbitrator approves all or part of the unions’ classifications and/or calculations, the escrowed money and interest allocable to that part of the fee will revert to the union(s).

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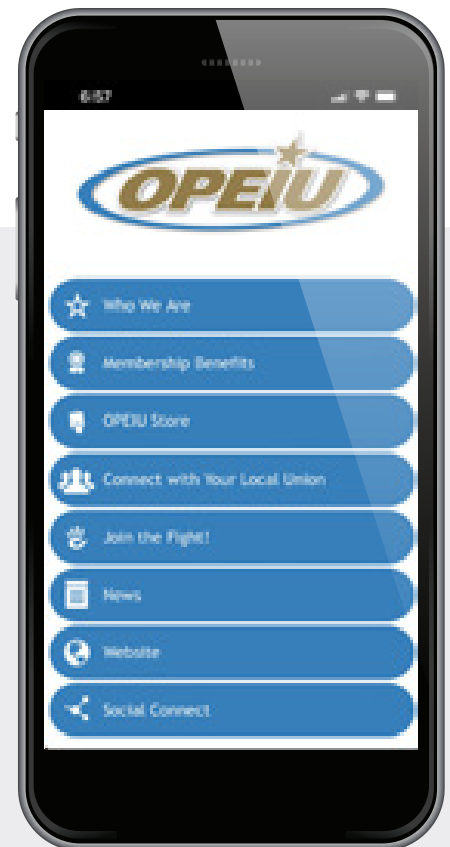


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