

COMMUNIQUE



Staff Representative Shakima Ivory meets with PAA Norma Lynch to review her Out-of-Title grievance. Story Pages 2-3

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it was **WORTH**

Union Helps Norma Lynch Take on Ag



"This is why you have the union. Let them help because they do. I feel good that I called my union and stuck with it and that the union was there every step of the way." — Norma Lynch

Norma Lynch has always been a team player. She's one of the first to help out a friend, a co-worker, and even her boss.

Lynch is a Principal Administrative Associate (PAA) Level I with the Department of Social Services (DSS). She has 12 years in total with the City of New York as a PAA, and many more years in other titles. She previously worked for the Police Department (NYPD) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) before being functionally transferred to her current position.

As both a Local 1180 Shop Steward and someone with years of City experience, Lynch knows what her job responsibilities are as a PAA. However, in October 2018, having just returned from medical leave, her Deputy Director in the DHS Vendor Payments Unit told Lynch they were short-staffed and asked her to help. The Deputy Director also was getting promoted and told Lynch she would need to learn some of the managerial tasks in order to fill in.

"I told her that I'm not supposed to do that type of work because it's not within my scope of duties. It was out of my job title," Lynch said. "She told me she was aware the work was out of title but in order to process the payments, I was going to need to learn to do it because she was leaving."

Lynch knew she needed to cooperate with her boss because not complying with a direct order would have been insubordination.

"I told her I was going to file a grievance with my union. I let her train me because I couldn't tell her 'no'. I went along with everything she asked but I told her at some point I would need to file because she needed to be replaced by someone other than a PAA."

Lynch assumed her boss' job responsibilities in late 2018 and continued doing them until 2020 when the pandemic forced a lockdown and sent a large portion of the city workforce to work from home.

In the meantime, Lynch contacted Local 1180 and explained the situation. After discussing all the details and putting together a case, Local 1180 filed an out-of-title grievance on her behalf on Nov. 7, 2019, arguing violations to Article VI, Section 1(c) of the Principal Administrative Associate collective bargaining agreement. By this time, her boss had already started a new job.

"She was still at DHS between 2018 and June 2019, but she was training me that whole time to do her job. She gave me

the FIGHT

By Marci Rosenblum, Communications Director

Agency with Out-of-Title Work Grievance

most of her work to do," Lynch said, "She even was nice enough to write a letter stating that I should be at least upgraded to a PAA III because I was going beyond my duties and my tasks".

Needless to say, the agency didn't agree.

Homeless Services never answered Lynch's Step I grievance. A Step II hearing was held on Jan. 27, 2020. The decision dated March 9, 2021, stated that based on a review of the functions, Lynch was performing work of a Clerical Associate III/Payment Officer/Payment Associate, but receiving pay of a PAA I. Therefore, there was no contractual violation.

The union proceeded to a Step III hearing on June 8, 2021, with Lynch being represented by CWA District 1.

In hindsight, Lynch knew she should have contacted her union much earlier, but management kept telling her they were hiring someone to replace her boss, although that did not happen until July 2021.

"They never replaced anyone to do her work when she left in June 2019. When I contacted Local 1180, the agency thought I had no leg to stand on, no reason to file," Lynch said. "They were wrong because I was clearly doing out-of-title work, but management's explanation was that giving me more work did not mean it was out-of-title work."

Lynch worked with Local 1180 to provide all the pertinent documentation, including the letter from her Deputy Director stating Lynch was doing 85% of her boss' work on a daily basis.

Lynch's job as a PAA I was as a Payment Officer, paying vendor invoices for the Department of Homeless Services. Once she assumed her boss' job responsibilities, she was faced with resolving invoice issues and approving the work of clerical staff. Prior, if Lynch uncovered a vendor invoice error, she simply reported it to her boss.

"If there were any problems, I would bring them to her, and she would find out what the problem was. I never had to approve any work. She would approve my work and other people's work. By the time she left, I was approving work from clericals and sometimes other managers who were there.

"You're talking about millions and millions of dollars in contracts that I had to approve and make

sure that everything was right. That was not part of my tasks."

Lynch said her former boss, the Deputy Director, was an Administrative Staff Analyst getting paid \$85,000 to \$90,000 a year while her salary hovered at \$50,000.

"If it wasn't for the union going step by step with me, I think I would have gotten discouraged because the agency does things to discourage you and try to intimidate you," Lynch said. "But the union had my back. I tried to provide them with as much documentation as I could, and the agency still denied it. The thing that really hurt me was when they stated they were paying me a PAA I salary to do Clerical III work."

On April 13, 2022, the City of New York, the New York City Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration, and Communications Workers of America on behalf of Norma Lynch entered into a Stipulation of Settlement, with a mutually agreed upon settlement of the instant grievance, without the necessity of any further proceedings. The Agency originally offered a \$5,000 settlement, but Local 1180 negotiated a much higher settlement of \$12,000.

As a Local 1180 Shop Steward since 2011, Lynch often gets members telling her they are being assigned out-of-title work. She tells everyone they need to contact their staff representative at the union.

"Unfortunately, a lot of members are afraid. After I talk to them about it, they never come back," she said. "We have the union and they are always there for us. They were there when I needed them and helped me prove that there was something wrong.

Lynch said she's glad she stood up to the agency and is encouraging other members to do the same if they find themselves doing work that violates the contract.

"I hope my story motivates other members to go out and let the union represent you. It's a win-win situation because my union did the work representing me. I felt like I was being put on trial by the Department. I felt like they were trying to call me a liar.

"This is why you have the union. Let them help because they do," she said. "I feel good that I called my union and stuck with it and that the union was there every step of the way. That helped a lot because there were points when I was getting angry. I never would have been successful without Local 1180's support and guidance.

"They stepped in when they had to step in, and they gave clarity. They helped me all the way and I'm so thankful. I'm proud of myself that I stuck it out because there were times where I just wanted to say, 'I don't need this.'"

Despite the process being a long and tedious one, Lynch said she has no regrets. Having now started — and successfully finished — an out-of-title grievance, as a Shop Steward she has a different perspective.

"It made me strong. I like fighting for people's rights and our members have rights. I had rights. I'm not a quitter and other members in similar situations shouldn't be afraid either," she said.

She strongly encourages members to get involved in their union so they can better understand the process of filing a grievance, Step hearings, contract details, and how Local 1180 can help with work-related problems.

As a Shop Steward, Lynch knows just how important it is for her to be visible to those she represents.

"Members need to know when to go to their Shop Steward. I have my 1180 red jacket in my cubicle. I have all my certificates. I introduce myself to new members and let them know I'm there. Everybody on the floor knows me and I tell them to come to me if there are problems," she said.

When the "problem" was Lynch's own, she knew better than most that Local 1180 would fight with her until the end.

"You have the right to fight and go all the way. As part of a union, we have the power to say 'no' at work when the work we're being assigned isn't ours," she said. "My fight shows that you can fight all the way and challenge what isn't right.

"You know, you have nothing to lose and \$12,000 to gain." ■

Historic NYC SALARY TRANSPARENCY LAW Took Effect Nov. 1, 2022

Governor Signed Statewide Law End of December



The long-awaited New York City Salary Transparency Law, Local Law 32, went into effect Nov. 1 and requires most employers in the City to include the minimum and maximum salary range for every job, promotion, and transfer opportunity advertised.

"This is a game changer in the fight to end wage inequality that is so rampant in New York City," said **Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton**. "Our union has been a leader in bringing pay discrimination and other job inequities in New York City to the forefront when we started with our lawsuit back in 2016 to fight for pay equity for our female and minority Administrative Managers.

"This new Local Law 32 is just another positive step in closing the gender and racial gap that is so rampant not only in New York City, but throughout the country," she said. "Hopefully other cities will see the steps we are taking here and follow suit."

With the new law, the salary range must be set in good faith and reflect how much the employer will pay for the position. The law, part of the NYC Human Rights law, applies to employers that have four or more employees or one or

more domestic workers. The workplace is covered as long as at least one of the employees works in New York City.

A similar bill was passed by the New York State Assembly and Senate in June 2022, which Gov. Hochul signed into law on Dec. 21.

S.9427-A/A.10477 establishes a statewide pay transparency law in New York State, requiring employers to list salary ranges for all advertised jobs and promotions.

"In order for New York to continue being the best place to work, we must create the best protections for our workers, and this legislation will help do exactly that," Governor Hochul said. "This historic measure will usher in a new era of fairness and transparency for New York's workforce and will be a critical tool in our efforts to end pervasive pay gaps for women and people of color."

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women made 83 cents for every dollar made by men in 2020; these disparities are even greater among Black women (64 cents) and Hispanic women (57 cents). The disclosures required by this law will empower workers with critical information, reduce discriminatory wage-setting and hiring practices, and help level the playing field for all workers.

Beverly Neufeld, President of PowHer New York, a network of 100-plus gender and racial justice organizations collaborating for women's economic equality, said that identifying the expected wage range for jobs will provide applicants with the information necessary to negotiate fairer salaries and help end the pernicious wage gap that continues to rob some workers, particularly women of color, of fair wages and economic well-being.

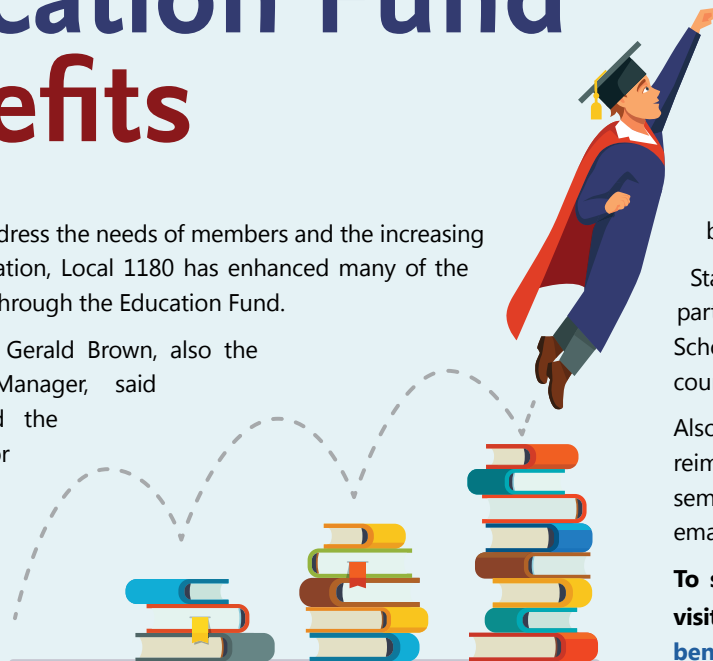
"This transparency will create a shift in practices and in culture that will put all job seekers on more equal footing," she said.

With salary ranges out in the open, employers must think critically about how they set pay at the front end of their process, addressing unconscious biases in hiring practices. Research reports that for businesses, it will make the hiring process more efficient and help to hire and retain the best talent to match their needs. ■

Union Enhances Education Fund Benefits

In order to better address the needs of members and the increasing cost of higher education, Local 1180 has enhanced many of the benefits it provides through the Education Fund.

First Vice President Gerald Brown, also the Education Fund Manager, said the union doubled the reimbursement for Adult Education courses and conferences from \$100 to \$200 per calendar



year for most adult education job-related and career-advancement courses. This includes courses taken in schools of continuing education in colleges and universities. In addition, this benefit includes courses offered at private institutions, such as Fred Pryor Learning.

"At Local 1180, we encourage our members to further their educations, which in turn helps them advance in their careers," Brown said. "That's why the Fund now offers a higher reimbursement for many education-related expenses."

He encourages members to visit the Local's website Benefits section in order to see everything that is available. Too often, members are unaware of all the benefits provided by Local 1180 despite varied attempts at promotion.

Starting with the Spring 2023 semester, the Education Fund will sponsor Fund participants to earn up to 30 undergraduate and 30 graduate credits at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU), including registration fees, for related courses in Urban and Labor Studies.

Also starting with the Spring 2023 semester, the Fund will sponsor a college tuition reimbursement program where individuals can be reimbursed up to \$400 per semester for courses taken at any accredited college or university. Watch your email for information on the April 3, 2023, Education Fund webinar.

To see a complete list of Education Fund benefits and what is available, visit the Union's website at [www.cwa1180.org/benefits-home/education-benefits-\(active\)](http://www.cwa1180.org/benefits-home/education-benefits-(active)) ■



GLORIA MIDDLETON

President

2022 — What a Year It's Been

The year 2022 kicked off with members in the New York City Transit Authority and the School Construction Authority overwhelmingly ratifying their respective contracts. That was one long battle to the finish line, but with almost everything labor-related, it's always an uphill climb.

Nothing good comes easy and the labor movement can attest to that.

We also had our first in-person Equal Pay Day rally since before the pandemic. It was so nice to finally be back together, face to face, rather than rallying via Zoom. While every form of communication is a positive step in keeping us all connected, there was nothing like being back together on the steps of City Hall.

As the year progressed, we saw the passage of a state budget that brought plenty of good news for Communications Workers of America, a city law requiring salary ranges to be listed for all job postings, and Juneteenth becoming an official paid holiday for government workers.

or co-worker in need. It also set a new tone for the workplace. Americans, long known for living to work, were no longer willing to be slaves to the workplace without getting something more than a meager paycheck in return. Work-from-home and hybrid work situations, the norm during the pandemic, became a way of life for so many now unwilling to adhere to a strict 9-to-5 office job. As a workforce, it became more about job safety and security, a work-life balance, and the ability to negotiate with management.

Workers in flux turned to unions for a helping hand in changing their lifestyles. No longer willing to sit back and be dictated to by greedy bosses, workers knew that unionizing was the answer.

The attacks, however, came from more than just corporate America. They also came from the Supreme Court of the United States that ended a woman's right to choose, a move that set our country back half a century — and upended Americans' rights to stay alive by striking down a state law requiring people to show a specific and valid need to carry a firearm in public before being granted permission to do so.

In our lifetime, we never would have imagined women having to once again fight for the right to control their own bodies. The SCOTUS decision sent shockwaves from coast to coast and became yet another driving factor in women banding together to fight back. Once again, we have found ourselves having to defend our rights and stand our ground more than we could have imagined.

From pay discrimination to the #metoo movement for justice and healing for sexual violence survivors, to fighting back to control our own bodies, it's déjà vu all over again. The decades-long women's suffrage movement from 1848 through 1917 certainly should have been a historical time, meaning something in the past. Yet here we are a century later and women's suffrage continues.

Economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and other conflicts have forced us into a world of multiplying challenges. Despite everything, Local 1180 continues to be an outspoken voice for not only women, the LGBTQ+, but the men of our

union as well. It was in 2022 that we formed our inaugural Men's Committee to address specific challenges men face on the job and in everyday life.

As a union in New York City, we have a reputation for standing up for those who need our help, whether an 1180 member or not. We are there for the underdog. We have worked with and supported other unions fighting pay inequities based on gender. We were the first to set the stage with our fight to earn back pay for Administrative Managers and we now use that knowledge to help others in similar situations.

One of our biggest hurdles of 2022 has been a resolution to health care. The Medicare Advantage Plan has been challenged at every turn and continues to be a persistent issue. We are hopeful that as the new year begins, the resolution is near. An independent and well-funded retiree group has done everything in its power to spread abundant mistruths about a situation that has been caused by a malfunctioning health care system across our country with pharma and hospital corporate greed making a bad situation even worse.

As we close out the year, it gives me a good opportunity to reflect on just how far we have come, though. Our battles have been numerous, but our successes have been sweet. By continuing to stick together and fighting as a unified voice, we continue to achieve greatness.

After all, whoever would have thought we'd see a union resurgence like what we're experiencing today?

On behalf of the entire Local 1180 Executive Board, I wish all our members and their families the best for a happy new year. It's only because of your support and encouragement that we are able to be the successful Union that every other Union and City agency respects, and allow you as members of this great local receive the dignity that you deserve. ■

Our battles have been numerous, but our successes have been sweet. By continuing to stick together and fighting as a unified voice, we can achieve greatness.

On the private sector front, Local 1180 organized several new groups, including Audubon workers in 11 states and regions, and finalized new contracts for many of our groups, including National Domestic Workers Alliance and Sunrise.

As usual, however, we also faced many attacks from corporate America looking to undermine our power. Union membership has been on the rise after decades of attacks on worker rights and power that sent labor's numbers tumbling for decades. Thanks to organizing efforts at top companies like Amazon and Starbucks, the union's voice was amplified like no other time in recent history.

The pandemic taught us all quite a bit. The power of positive thinking, not taking our health for granted, and the gratitude we can feel simply by helping out a neighbor

1180 Shows Its Pride at

AFRICAN AMERICAN DAY

PARADE



The New York City African American Day Parade celebrated its 53rd year in the Harlem Community on Sept. 18 with thousands of marchers and spectators taking part in the annual event. This year's theme was "Good Health is Essential" and honored those individuals who have contributed to the African American community in the health field. Second Vice President Teesha Foreman said the goals of the parade are to highlight African American culture, heritage, and culture while inspiring a world where African Americans can excel in business, education, health, arts, politics, government, and of course, as leaders in the labor movement. The parade is held the third Sunday in September on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. This boulevard was the heart of the Harlem Renaissance, an era known for the major advancement of African American culture which in turn proclaimed Harlem as the Black capital of America. "We had such a great member turnout that allowed Local 1180 to shine among all the other unions that were marching as well," Foreman said "We had special t-shirts made that we gave to everyone, which helped unify our union and show our solidarity." ■



UPDATE ON MEDICARE Advantage Plus Program

Making the limited proposed change to the Administrative Code preserves premium-free health benefits for all and restores the ability of the MLC to negotiate plan options. There is much misinformation being spread about the proposed amendment. It does not change the statutory obligation for the City to provide premium-free health benefits to actives, pre-65 retirees, Medicare-eligible retirees and their dependents. No one is selling off future benefits. While some spreading misinformation have come to focus on city benefits recently, the MLC and its unions have been fighting for and preserving quality benefits for many decades. The amendment is needed to continue that fight. Saying no to the amendment does not freeze benefits in time. We cannot hide our heads in the sand and pretend that outside forces are not impacting the efficient delivery of healthcare, that healthcare costs are not rising at staggering rates and that current structures are not sustainable without thoughtful changes.

The MLC and its unions have long worked to protect employees and retirees, but wishful thinking will not pay the difference in premiums between the HIP HMO and the GHI CBP plan. It is not the Administrative Code that has provided the GHI CBP plan to actives and pre-65 retirees premium-free for decades; it is the unions and their consistent fight for your benefits. It is not the Administrative Code (or some loud latecomers) who have fought for quality thoughtful plan designs for decades; it was the MLC and its unions. The Administrative Code (amendment or not) does not require any specific plan design. Threats of stripped networks and high co-pays and plans dredged up from late night television are scare tactics. The new Medicare Advantage plan proposed by the MLC mirrored and improved upon the existing Senior Care plan, with the added bonus of allowing the City to tap into additional federal funding to defray the cost. When all the real facts were finally out to be seen, the opponents could only identify one real difference between the plans: the new plan would require prior authorization for some services while Senior Care did not.

While some have characterized that in dark terms, the practical reality is that all those Medicare retirees had prior authorization when they were actives, all the current actives have prior authorization, and all of the pre-65 retirees have had and continue to have prior authorization. Remember, it was the MLC and the unions that fought to preserve Senior Care as an option for retirees. The single-minded drive of a few to not charge for Senior Care has led to the opposite result.

As pointed out by Judge Frank and the First Department judges, the Administrative Code may require that plans be paid for up to the cost of the HIP HMO, but it does not require that the City offer more than one plan. This supposed "win" has backfired, leading to an even worse situation, with the City doing as the Judges suggested and pushing for removal of all the previously provided pay up options.

NOTE: All information in this article is accurate as of the time the Communique went to print. ■

MEMBERS IN ACTION

Supporting the UAW Strike



When brothers and sisters at another union go on strike, Local 1180 is there for support. Part-time faculty at the New School are striking as negotiations between the two parties over pay and working conditions stalled. According to union organizers, the university walked away from the bargaining table after making a “final offer” that failed to account for the cost-of-living raises sought by staff. Local 1180 Staff Rep Anthony Lewis, Membership Coordinator Deborah Valentin, and Human Resources Representative Deaven Richardson joined the picket lines. ■



Union Gives Men a Voice with New Committee



On Nov. 1, 2022, CWA Local 1180 launched its inaugural Men’s Committee with the goal of providing male members with a forum to bond and collectively address life-impacting matters they face within and outside the workplace. Committee members will be given the opportunity to take advantage of workshops, presentations, and other activities designed to advance their overall wellness, as well as identify and cultivate their abilities to become community and union activists.

The initial Committee meeting was attended by members from the various mayoral agencies such as BOE, DEP, DOC, FDNY, HRA, and NYC Health+Hospitals. Members networked, talked about personal issues, and participated in discussions about the mission and vision of the Committee, which included:

- Building unity amongst male members to collectively address workplace and social issues.

- Encouraging more men to become active in the union — advocacy, mobilizing, organizing and facilitating union-based initiatives.
- Assisting the union in addressing/supporting women’s issues such as, pay equity, childcare, harassment, and unequal access to promotions.
- Increasing the voice of men as a recognized constituency politically, and within their respective communities.
- Augmenting union stewardship at city agencies.
- Promoting unionism through the development of youth mentorship initiatives.
- Addressing issues that impact men’s health—mental illness, stress, etc.

Men’s Committee meetings are the second Tuesday of every month from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. ■

Certificate of Achievement



HRA Shop Steward Ellice Vessels (right) presents a Certificate of Achievement to HRA **Administrative Job Opportunity Specialist Yama Phillips** that recognizes her 34 years of service to the City of New York. A special retirement celebration was held for Phillips on Sept. 29, with greetings being given by Alfred J. Bush, Deputy Regional Manager of SNAP and Vessels, who represented CWA Local 1180. Phillips began her career with the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) on May 1, 1988, after graduating from the College of Staten Island of the City University of New York, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. Her initial position with the agency was as an Eligibility Specialist III at the Richmond Job Center in Staten Island. She was promoted to Principal Administrative Associate I and II and continued her rise through the ranks to the Associate Job Opportunity Specialists III and the Administrative Job Opportunity Specialists I as the director of Borough Hall Food Stamps Office F-23. When the Brooklyn Borough Hall Food Stamp Office closed, Phillips was reassigned for four months to the Bronx Region to mentor new directors. Her commitment and dedication to the program afforded her a new opportunity to serve as Director of Special Projects, Outreach, Research and Technology (SPORT) where she was responsible for overseeing and coordinating federal and state external audit responses and tracking corrective action plans for SNAP. Her final position with the agency was Deputy Regional Manager for Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Special Populations Region. When asked why she is retiring now, she said, "I have given the Human Resources Administration's Family Independence Administration all that I have to offer, and it is time for me to move on to the next chapter in my life. I hope that I have shared my knowledge and skills with my colleagues, and they will continue to serve New Yorkers less fortunate and in need of our services." ■

Back-to-School Supply Drive Helps Kids in Harlem

Local 1180 brought a smile to the faces of dozens of school children in Harlem who were the recipients of the back-to-school drive sponsored by the Union this summer. Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School in Harlem thanked Local 1180 members for their support and the large donation. Knowing that so many children from economically disadvantaged families were in need of basic school supplies, President Gloria Middleton reached out to members via the website, social media, and the weekly email blast asking for donations: pens, pencils, crayons, markers, notebooks, glue, tissues, and knapsacks. "As expected, our members stepped up to the plate and made so many children really happy," she said. "The photos we received from the school showing the teachers and students with the supplies makes our efforts all the more worthwhile." Local 1180 staff members Nicolas Garcia and Clint John delivered the donations. ■



Supporting Times Guild on Strike

CWA members of the Times Guild have been without a contract since March 2021. They are part of the News Guild of New York, Local 31003, working at the *New York Times*. After 20 months of bargaining, they are fed up. More than 1,000 workers pledged to walkout for a 24-hour strike if a deal was not reached by Dec. 8. Local 1180 **retirees Beverline Parks** and **Lelia Brunson** marched in solidarity on the picket line with CWA brothers and sisters. ■



Antisemitism on the RISE

By Marci Rosenblum, Communications Director

Dealing with antisemitism is not new for Jews. However, the past two years have seen a drastic spike in what's often called one of the "longest hatreds" of any particular group. While antisemitism clearly is not a modern phenomenon, something happened in both 2021 and 2022 that sparked massive outrage in prejudice and violence, leaving the Jewish population realizing that "never again," the phrase used by Jews to mean they will not stand for a repeat Holocaust, could be now.

"What began as a conflict over religious beliefs evolved into a systematic policy of political, economic, and social isolation, exclusion, degradation, and attempted annihilation. It did not begin in the Nazi era, nor did it end with the close of World War II. Its continuance over the millennia speaks to the power of scapegoating a group that is defined as the 'other,'" according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

Immediately following the Holocaust, antisemitism was far less accepted as both individuals and countries had seen the horrors of Auschwitz. While antisemitism did not completely disappear post-Holocaust, openly expressing hatred toward Jews was curtailed. As more than half a century now has passed since that horrific time, and Holocaust survivors who can tell their stories are dwindling in number, ignorance of that part of history is growing, leading to a rise in antisemitic attacks, both verbal and physical.

"It's been 70 years since the Holocaust, and we are seeing a huge increase in antisemitism being expressed publicly and violently. A quiet hatred of Jews has unfortunately existed for some time, but now it's being broadcast openly. Jews are being attacked on the streets simply because they are Jewish, and it has to stop," said **Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton**, an outspoken voice for stopping hatred toward all groups.

While Jews have forever been the center of conspiracy theories around economy, power, and greed, the hate message spreads faster and wider today thanks to social media. When these core antisemitic tropes are broadcast by celebrities like Ye (the former Kanye West) who spewed antisemitic and pro-Hitler rhetoric online to his more than 30 million followers, including his threat to go "death con 3" on Jews, Nets star Kyrie Irving who linked on his social media to an antisemitic movie about Jews lying about their origins and claiming the Holocaust never happened, and elected officials like former President Donald Trump who recently dined with both Ye and Nick Fuentes, the white nationalist internet streamer, increased extremist and neo-Nazi recruiting follow.

Unfortunately, other elected officials have followed in Trump's footsteps and have been the impetus for Jew haters banding together in violence. After U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (Georgia) spoke at a fundraising event hosted by Fuentes, and U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar from Arizona addressed that same event, violence against Jews peaked.

All of this violence could be due, in part, to outright ignorance — the fact that a majority of U.S. states don't even have laws requiring public school students to learn about the horrors of the Holocaust, according to data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). As of Dec. 16, 2022, only 18 states required Holocaust and genocide education, with only five (New York, New Jersey, Florida, Illinois, and Michigan) enacting that legislation prior to 2017. Thirteen states enacted similar legislation after 2017 when Donald Trump took office and the nation saw a spike in antisemitic violence, while 33 states do not require any Holocaust education at all.

A 50-state survey in 2020 of U.S. millennials and Gen Zers revealed a frightening lack of basic Holocaust knowledge.

"It's scary that a large percentage of our youth today are unaware of the Holocaust and what transpired. If we don't learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat it," Middleton said.

State-by-state NCSL survey results showed a significant lack of awareness of the Holocaust: 63% of respondents did not know that 6 million Jews were murdered; 36% answered there were 2 million or fewer murdered; 48% could not name even one of the more than 40,000 concentration camps and ghettos established during World War II; 11% of respondents believe Jews themselves caused the Holocaust; and a shocking 59% of Millennials and Gen Z adults believe something like the Holocaust could happen again.

The ADL, which tracks antisemitic behavior nationwide, found 2,717 incidents in 2021 — a 34% increase from the year before. That averages to more than seven antisemitic incidents per day. New York City, home to one of the largest Jewish populations outside of Israel, saw a 125% increase in Jewish hate crimes in November 2022 after both Ye and Irving verbally attacked Jews to their combined 50-million-plus followers. Irving has since apologized for his statements, but the damage had already been done. For reference, the worldwide population of Jews is estimated at only 15 million, less than one third of their combined followers.

New York City Police Department data showed antisemitic hate crimes escalated during 2022, with February as the worst month at 56 anti-Jewish hate crimes reported compared to 11 the same month a year earlier. November 2022 data showed 45 antisemitic hate crimes were reported compared to 20 in November 2021, the first of the two years in antisemitic hate crime escalation.

These numbers clearly indicate the importance of Holocaust education. Unless it becomes a significant part of school curriculum, signs reading "Jews to the gas" and "Hitler should have finished the job" will continue to surface, leading to violent attacks and murder simply based on a misconception.

Just as the pandemic was blamed on anyone Asian-looking, and Blacks bear the onus for crime and are lambasted for demonstrating against racism, Jews are condemned for controlling the media and Hollywood, for being wealthy, and for having too much power in the business world. Holocaust history shows that targeting an entire group has sweeping consequences in society, including an increase in xenophobia, racism, and extremism, that often lead to brutal attacks on individuals, communities, and even entire countries.

"Words matter," Middleton said. "Actions matter. Hate against any group becomes normalized when very little is done to combat the problem. We cannot continue to let haters of any religion, race, gender, or nationality continue along this path of destruction. Haven't we learned anything from our history?"

Antisemitic crimes are part of a much larger problem of segregation and hate for anyone who doesn't look, act, dress, or speak the same as most of a country.

And herein lies the bottom line.

"Education of not only the Holocaust, but slavery, removal of Indigenous peoples, and other events that play such a large and crucial part in history, is a tool for combatting the violent hatred we see far too often in today's society," she said. "No child is born 'hating' anyone. Hatred is learned. Until our children are taught about the wrongs in history, our country's and world's future will not be right. We must focus on education at all levels because even adults are perpetuating hate crimes." ■



GERALD BROWN

First Vice President

What's Good for the Goose Isn't Good for the Gander

Last year, the Biden administration announced a plan targeted to low- and middle-income families to help with college debt.

The Student Debt Relief Plan would forgive up to \$20,000 in debt for Pell Grant recipients and \$10,000 for other borrowers. It was expected to provide, in total, roughly \$500 billion in student debt relief.

The day the application opened on Oct. 15, 2022, more than 8 million applications were immediately filed. At that time, President Biden called the program a "game-changer for millions of Americans." While struggling students and their families were thrilled at the prospect of some much-needed financial relief, several Republican and Conservative states were not.

Let's boil this down to its basics. A Republican-initiated plan, reportedly riddled with fraud, to help struggling businesses during COVID will cost taxpayers nearly twice (\$800 billion) what the Democrat-initiated plan to help reduce student debt would cost taxpayers at a reported \$430 billion. Yet, no one is challenging the former.

The plan has faced a series of legal challenges since it was first announced from states including Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Carolina, with these and others arguing the plan goes too far and contending certain borrowers were unfairly boxed out from loan forgiveness.

The plan would cancel up to \$10,000 of student debt for borrowers who earn up to \$125,000 a year or \$250,000 for married couples filing their taxes jointly. Borrowers who had Pell Grants can receive up to \$20,000 in debt relief. So, it's not like college graduates with high starting salaries are even included.

In fact, Pell grants by their nature are geared toward recipients in the lower economic threshold and are more than likely to be Black or Hispanic and come from less educated families than the general population.

In early November, a federal judge declared the plan illegal, ruling that only Congress could authorize this large-scale debt relief. Just weeks later, the Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments in one of the legal challenges to the plan.

All of this leaves me wondering why these same states did not file lawsuits against the federal government for issuing PPP loans during COVID? As of now, virtually all PPP loans have been forgiven with almost no scrutiny as to whether those who received the loans were actually entitled to them. Just as the PPP loans were intended to help those struggling financially due to the pandemic, so too, is the Student Debt Relief Plan.

The government issued roughly \$800 billion in loans geared toward helping small businesses keep workers employed. Yet, those loans have now become grants, meaning they do not get repaid, for close to 100% of those receiving them.

At least one research study indicates that about 1.4 million PPP loans show signs of possible fraud. While the Small Business Administration disputes that fact, its own Inspector General has estimated at least 70,000 loans could be potentially fraudulent.

Let's boil this down to its basics. A Republican-initiated plan, reportedly riddled with fraud, to help struggling businesses during COVID will cost taxpayers nearly twice (\$800 billion) what the Democrat-initiated plan to help reduce student debt would cost taxpayers at a reported \$430 billion. Yet, no one is challenging the former.

Just as the PPP program was limited to a short, specific timeframe, so is the Student Debt Relief Program. The debt relief applies only to loan balances prior to June 30, 2022. Any new loans disbursed on or after July 1, are not eligible for debt relief.

Since the loan forgiveness application was released, 26 million people applied and 16 million were approved for relief before the Department of Education was forced to halt the application process due to the litigation, according to the Biden Administration. All of that forgiveness is now on hold pending the legal challenges.

It's important to remember what the Student Debt Relief Plan is intended to do — help those Americans with college loans who are unable to meet even the smallest of monthly payments when they graduate. The remainder earn too much money and will not qualify.

Both the PPP program and the Student Debt Relief Plan were implemented to help those impacted by the pandemic. However, the PPP program turning into grants the majority of loans, often in the millions of dollars to large companies that were not the intended recipient. The debt relief program is limited to no more than \$20,000 and can have almost no fraud as the federal government already had financial records for recipients on file from federal aid applications.

States that have sued argue that the forgiveness will "harm the public interest". Why is it that the PPP program didn't do the same? It's a matter of politics and comes down to which side of the aisle you're on.

Due to the lawsuits, no one with a federally held loan has had to pay a single dollar in loan payments as the repayment has been paused multiple times thanks to the Biden administration.

There is clearly a different set of standards being set by those running our country. When politics takes precedence over doing what's right, we have a problem. This time, it's tightening the financial noose that hangs around the necks of graduates.

A college education is supposed to be a stepping stone to a middle-class life, not something that mires students in debt for up to 30 years, often saddling families with unbearable debt.

It's unfortunate that what was good for the business or corporate goose is not good for the new college gander. ■

PRIVATE SECTOR SHOPS

AUDUBON LAUNCHES MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN



In October 2022, members of the Audubon Society mobilizing committee of the union at the Audubon Society, "The Bird Union", came to CWA 1180 to launch a mobilizing campaign in support of their ongoing, inaugural contract bargaining. The Audubon Society management continues to push back on the content and pace of contract negotiations, thus the mobilizing and bargaining committees continue to develop strategies to organize and engage their membership in preparation for action. Mobilizing Committee Members, along with the private sector team at CWA 1180, sent out 204 packages to Bird Union members with Bird Union-branded sweatbands, water bottles, pins, and Agree/Disagree signs for members to use during virtual bargaining. At the end of October, the Bird Union kicked off this mobilizing campaign by wearing their sweatbands to a virtual, all-staff meeting as a signal of their collective power and continued dedication to fighting for a fair contract. We look forward to seeing how the Bird Union will continue to leverage these materials as their negotiations continue.

In the nine months of bargaining, CWA has filed two unfair labor practices ("ULPs") against the Audubon Society. The first ULP was regarding Audubon's "Career and Salary" plan, an attempt to harmonize job descriptions, update salaries, and create a process of promotions that aren't seen as bias or subject to nepotism using recommendations from the organization Mercer. As these recommendations and information have a heavy impact on the bargaining unit, Local 1180 has requested that Audubon turn over all of the information and data of Mercer's work so it can be reviewed before the Union submits proposals.

"CWA believes our bargaining committee has a right to that information under the law and filed its first ULP so that bargaining can move forward," said Local 1180's **Private Sector Shop Steward Christopher Thomas**.

The second ULP was filed when the Audubon Society changed its staff's health care plan offerings during bargaining, which is a violation of the status quo, claiming they are willing to bargain with the Union about any interim

changes to health care while rejecting all of the Union's counter proposals. Audubon is not allowed to change the terms and conditions of work during bargaining, which includes health care plans, without the Union's approval as is legally required.

"They made these changes without even telling their managers and as such, CWA has made its second filing," Thomas said. "Despite Audubon's claims to respect its staff's decision to unionize, their senior leadership repeatedly acts in ways to make bargaining as contentious as possible, including withholding information and making unilateral decisions. Then they wonder why their staff is angry." ■



BARGAINING UPDATES



Members of **Edible Schoolyard** have ratified their second contract with the educational organization Edible Schoolyard in Brooklyn. The most recent contract includes significant increases to the minimum salaries for new staff and an average of 14.2% in salary increases for current staff retroactive to July 1, 2022. This increase helped bring staff who have been severely underpaid for years up to industry pay standards.

The contract also adds updated language to the discharge and discipline, non-discrimination, and layoff sections of this agreement. "Members are pleased with the wins that we were able to achieve for this two-year contract," said Local 1180's **Private Sector Shop Steward Christopher Thomas**. ■



human rights first

Human Rights First members voted to ratify their next contract that includes significantly higher minimum salaries, annual salary increases of 3.5%, a 4.5% salary increase for this year retroactive to May 1, 2022, and longevity increase. The contract also includes language regarding acting/covering pay, and additional increases for promotions. Finally, the members also won some limitation on the businesses ability to use contractors to do the work that falls within the bargaining unit, a commitment by the organization to hire people from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds, include Juneteenth and Indigenous People's day to their holidays, and expand their non-discrimination language. ■

Union staff and members continue to bargain contracts at the following shops:

- Human Rights Watch
- Open Society Foundations
- Audubon Society
- Physicians for Human Rights
- Books and Rattles
- Type Media
- StoryCorps

Beginning in 2023, CWA Local 1180 will be bargaining contracts at the Javits Center, Sunrise Movement, and Type Media. ■

Have an **UPDATE** or **NEWS** from your Private Sector Shop? Send information and photos to Staff Rep Chris Thomas at cthomas@cwa1180.org

CWA LOCAL 1180 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Sept. 22, 2022

Meeting called to order at 6:55 p.m.

Executive Board Members in Attendance:

Officers

Gloria Middleton, President; Gerald Brown, First Vice President; Teesha Foreman, Second Vice President; Robin Blair-Batte, Secretary-Treasurer; Lourdes Acevedo, Recording Secretary

Members-At-Large

Amica Benjamin, Ranston Foster, Denise Gilliam, Helen S. Jarrett, Debra Paylor, Rosario Roman, Gregory Smith, Venus Colon Williams, Hazel O. Worley

President's Report

Minutes of the July 26, 2022, meeting were presented. Motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept minutes with necessary corrections.

In the interest of time, President Middleton waived the highlights of her schedule since the last Executive Board meeting held on July 26, 2022.

President Middleton announced the New York City Municipal Labor Council continues negotiating the Medicare Advantage Plan that will help with the rising cost of health care while ensuring the preservation of benefits.

She distributed the CWA History, CWA Constitution, and Roberts Rule of Order. Additionally, she distributed and discussed the status reports dated Sept. 1, 2022, from the Law Offices of Mirkin & Gordon, P.C. listing legal matters being handled on behalf of CWA Local 1180. Lastly, she distributed and discussed the Sept. 20, 2022, monthly project updates memorandum submitted by Marci Rosenblum, CWA Local 1180 Communications Director.

A motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept the President's Report.

First Vice President's Report

First Vice President Gerald Brown held a discussion regarding the additional candidates for Congressional endorsements.

Motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to endorse Jerrold Nadler for Congressional District 12 and Dan Goldman for Congressional District 10.

Brown announced there are four referendums in the November General Election — three for New York City and one for New York State. Motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to vote YES for the listed proposals:

#1: Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022

#2: "Just and Equitable City for All" Charter Preamble Amendment

#3: Racial Equity Office, Commissions and Plans

#4: "True Cost of Living Measure" Amendment

With no further business, a motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept the First Vice President's report.

Second Vice President's Report

Second Vice President Teesha Foreman announced the Office of Labor Relations denied 37 Administrative Manager Appeals. They will be forwarded for expedited arbitration.

Foreman announced preparations are on track for the upcoming Shop Steward Conference. She also announced that the 53rd African American Day Parade was held Sept. 18, 2022.

A motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept the Second Vice President's report.

Secretary-Treasurer's Report

Secretary-Treasurer Robin Blair-Batte presented the CWA Local 1180 Transaction Detail and Income and Expenditures Reports for August 2022. She advised that the T.D. checking account has a balance of \$983,557.69 as of C.O.B. Sept. 22, 2022.

Blair-Batte reported the following member activity for July 2022:

New Member Enrollments..... 33
Deceased..... 0
New Retirements..... 35
Deceased..... 9
Total Active Members..... 8,137
Total Retired Members..... 6,729

Blair-Batte reported the CWA Local 1180 Shop Steward Conference will be held Sept. 30, 2022–Oct. 2, 2022.

CWA Local 1180 Headquarters at 6 Harrison St. is open. Members are being seen by appointments ONLY. Members who need assistance should call 212.226.6565 or e-mail staffrepervices@cwa1180.org.

With no further business, a motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept the Secretary-Treasurer's Report.

Recording Secretary Report

Recording Secretary Lourdes Acevedo participated in the CWA 2022 Human Rights Conference and the New York State AFL-CIO 2022 COPE Convention. She participated in the CWA 1180 Candidate Screening and continues contributing to the CWA Local 1180 Trustee meetings. Additionally, she contributes to the CWA Local 1180 General Membership meeting.

A motion was duly made, seconded, and carried to accept the Recording Secretary's report.

Members-at-Large Reports

Debra Paylor reported the following events and meetings she attended: Aug. 2: Candidate Screening; Aug. 6-11: CWA Human Rights Conference; Aug. 16: COPE Convention; Aug. 18: CWA National Minority Caucus Meeting; Aug. 27: Bronx Community Coordinating Committee Family Day in Pelham Bay Park; Sept. 6: Bronx Community Coordinating Committee meeting; Sept. 7: Disabilities Committee meeting; Sept. 10: Labor Day Parade; Sept. 12: Brooklyn Borough Coordinating Committee meeting; Sept. 14: Staten Island Borough Coordinating Committee meeting; Sept. 15: Retirement

Celebration for Cheryl Allen-Freeman; Sept. 15: NYCCLC Delegates meeting; Sept. 18: African American Day Parade; Sept. 20: Manhattan Borough Community Coordinating Committee meeting; Sept. 21: General Membership meeting.

Helen S. Jarrett attended the following in August and September: Candidate Screening for the 10th and 12th Congressional Districts; Jimmy Young's Retirement; CWA Virtual Midterm Elections 2022 Kick-Off; CWA Human Rights Conference; Labor Day Parade Meeting; AFL-CIO 2022 COPE Convention; CWA Local 1180's In-Person Ring Central Training; NYCCLC Delegates meeting; NYCCLC Labor Day Parade; Brooklyn's Virtual Borough Meeting; Gov. Kathy Hochul Public Student Loan Forgiveness Bill Signing; CWA 1180's Archive and Computer Training; African American Day Parade; Manhattan's Virtual Borough Community Coordinating Committee meeting; September's In-Person General Membership Meeting; September's Executive Board Meeting; CUNY – Worker Led Upsurge: Amazon & Starbucks Webinar; Shop Steward Conference.

Greg Smith announced the inaugural CWA Local 1180 Men's Committee on Nov. 1, 2022. The Committee will provide a forum for the union's male members to network and collectively deal with internal and external work place issues. It was well attended.

Amica Benjamin announced that membership continues to grow at FISA/OPA.

Next meeting date of the Executive Board is Nov. 28, 2022.

Motion was duly made, seconded and carried to adjourn at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lourdes Acevedo
Recording Secretary

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TestingAccommodations@dcas.nyc.gov

Investigation-related inquiries
DCASinvestigations@dcas.nyc.gov

Fingerprint-related inquiries
DASFingerprints@dcas.nyc.gov

COMMITTEES

Civil Rights & Equity/Community Service Committee

Hazel O. Worley, Chair
hworley@cwa1180.org
Meeting: 3rd Tuesday of each month

Editorial Committee

Marci Rosenblum, Chair
mrosenblum@cwa1180.org

Education Committee

Meeting: 2nd Monday of each month
Chair and email to be announced

Hispanic Committee

Venus Williams, Chair
vwilliams@cwa1180.org
Meeting: 2nd Thursday of each month

Legislative and Political Committee

Gerald Brown, Chair
gbrown@cwa1180.org

Men's Committee

Gregory Smith, Chair
gsmith@cwa1180.org
Meeting: 2nd Tuesday of each month

Organizing Committee

Leslie Fine, Chair
lfine@cwa1180.org

People with Disabilities Committee

Edward Yood, Chair
envpush.yme@verizon.net
Meeting: 1st Wednesday of each month

Pride Committee

Vera Jordan, Chair
vjordan@health.nyc.gov

Women's Committee

Denise Gilliam, Chair
dgilliam@cwa1180.org
Meeting: 2nd Tuesday of each month

BOROUGH COMMUNITY COORDINATING COMMITTEES

Bronx BCCC

Zenola Fields, Chair
1mszfields@gmail.com

Brooklyn BCCC

Ingrid Brown-Lewis, Chair
ingrideb.lewis66@gmail.com

Manhattan BCCC

Veronica Windley, Chair
rondiggy@hotmail.com

Queens BCCC

Elaine Blair, Chair
eilblair5@gmail.com

Staten Island BCCC

Dolores Andino, Chair
doloresmandino@gmail.com

MOST meetings start at 6 p.m. and are held virtually until further notice.

CONGRATULATIONS & CONDOLENCES

Congratulations to **Shop Stewards Robin Harris-Holley** (Department of Design and Construction) and **Wanda Peakes** (Human Resources Administration) who both retired at the end of 2022. Harris-Holley retired on Aug. 15, 2022, after 36 years of service with the City, while Peakes retired on Feb. 24, 2022, with 30 years. CWA Local 1180 **Staff Representative Gregory Smith** offered the Union's congratulations to them both while presenting each with a plaque recognizing their work with both the Union and civil service. ■



Congratulations to Local 1180 President **Gloria Middleton** who was honored by The New York City Black Women's Political Club at their 2022 INSPIREHER Awards for being an inspiration locally and nationally and for her dedication to using her platform to advance causes that affect change and empower the disenfranchised.

Pictured with Middleton (second from left) are Membership Coordinator Deborah Valentin, NYS Assemblymember Latrice M. Walker, Local 1180 Staff Representative Desiree Waters, and Secretary-Treasurer Robin Blair-Batte. ■



Congratulations to former Local 1180 President **Arthur Cheliotos** who was honored by the Association of Benefits Administrators with the Dr. Thomas J. Mackell Jr. Distinguished Service Award for "grateful appreciation and recognition of his many years of devoted service toward securing decent jobs with good benefits and a dignified retirement." Pictured with Cheliotos are Sean Mackell (left), son of Thomas Mackell and Program & Field Coordinator at New York City Central Labor Council, and NYS Senator Jessica Ramos. ■

Condolences to the family of **Catherine Tucker** (Computer Associate Tech Support, HRA) who passed away on May 28, 2021. Tucker worked for HRA at 250 Church St. from 1972-1995 as a systems tester for operations. ■

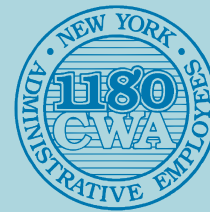
IN MEMORIAM

NAME	AGENCY/FACILITY	DECEASED
Grace Bellomo	Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP)	10/6/2022
Elizabeth Brodie	Department of Education	6/26/2022
Brenda Brown	Dept. of Corrections	10/29/2022
Bernadine Brown	Health + Hospital Corp.	11/17/2022
Robin Bryant	Dept. of Social Services	12/5/2022
Jacqueline Cabrera	Department of Transportation	10/18/2022
Marcia Campbell	Housing Preservation & Development	8/13/2022
Barbara Cane	Coney Island Hospital	9/1/2022
Carmen Castro	Queens Hospital Center	12/12/2022
Archie Davis	Dept. of Social Services	8/15/2022
Vita DiLeo	Finance Administration	6/3/2022
Elena Estwick	Fire Department	9/27/2022
Lovely Faison	Administration for Children Services (ACS)	7/23/2022
Albert George	Dept. of Social Services	10/28/2022
Walter Gilbert	Kings County Hospital Center	10/26/2022
Alice Greene	Health + Hospital Corp	10/25/2022
Michael Irvin	School Construction Authority	10/16/2022
Kathy Johnson	Administration for Children Services (ACS)	9/12/2022
Chrystal Johnson	Dept. of Social Services	10/17/2022
Tommie Joiner	Department of Education	11/2/2022
Julia Jones	Police Department	9/29/2022
Frances Jones	Dept. of Social Services	7/5/2022
Elizabeth Kilgore	Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene	12/2/2022
Joseph Knight	Dept. of Social Services	12/4/2022
Lori Kuehbauch	Police Department	10/2/2022
Victoria O'Neal	Police Department	11/5/2022
Judy Ortiz	Health + Hospital Corp.	10/5/2022
Lily Ann Padilla	Health + Hospital Corp	9/13/2022
Dyal Phagoo	Dept. of Social Services	10/31/2022
Rita Pinks	Department Of Buildings	10/11/2022
Mary Pittelli	Dept. of Social Services	10/11/2022
Evelyn Purvis	Housing Preservation & Development	9/9/2022
Pearl Rabinowitz	Dept. of Social Services	10/2/2022
Tatyana Rammairone	Coney Island Hospital	7/11/2022
Ann Rosenfeld	Dept. of Social Services	8/17/2022
Dolores Sobel	Finance Administration	6/9/2022
Rebecca Tripp	Health + Hospital Corp	6/7/2022
Keith Walker	Queens Hospital Center	8/31/2022

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 Gerald Brown, First Vice President
 Teesha Foreman, Second Vice President
 Robin Blair-Batte, Secretary-Treasurer
 Lourdes Acevedo, Recording Secretary

Members-At-Large

Amica Benjamin, Ranston Foster, Denise Gilliam,
 Helen S. Jarrett, Debra Paylor, Rosario Roman,
 Gregory Smith, Venus Williams, Hazel O. Worley

Communications Director

Communique Editor/Designer Marci Rosenblum • Tricomm
 Creative, Inc.

www.tricommcreative.com

Communique Facilitators

Gerald Brown, Gloria Middleton

Printed by DG3 North America
 Ron Koff • ron.koff@dg3.com

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Triple-Demic is NEW Winter Health Threat

As if the past two winters with the pandemic haven't wreaked enough havoc on the country's health care system, medical experts are warning of a triple health threat this winter caused by not one, but three viruses.

This trio of viral threats includes respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza (flu), and COVID, all of which already are sending an untold number of patients into hospital emergency rooms.

Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton said that unions have been warning members of a potential spike in COVID cases during the colder months and encouraging everyone to report any workplace problems that could contribute to an outbreak.

"COVID cases were expected to rise during the winter, and we are seeing reports of this being true," Middleton said. "This comes at the same time influenza rates are increasing and RSV season is kicking into high gear. We are definitely encouraging all our members and their families to stay vigilant and remember that while the pandemic itself is over, COVID is not gone."

Health care professionals say the winter season is off to a rough start as the cold temperatures keep more people indoors, thereby creating a breeding ground for viruses. Beginning with Thanksgiving, an increasing number of family and friend get-togethers, often indoors, means exposure rates have been on the rise. While COVID-19 cases reportedly have been decreasing, doctors are worried about low booster rates and new variants circulating. Doctors say the respiratory viruses are spreading more rapidly now because COVID-19 precautions, like masking, are no longer being observed by many people.

To slow the transmission of these viruses, the New York City Health Commissioner issued a Health Advisory on Dec. 9, 2022, that urges New York City residents to "use high-quality masks when indoors and in crowded outdoor settings. This is especially important for people who are at increased risk for complications from COVID-19, RSV, or the flu, such as those age 65 and older and people who are immunocompromised."

The Health Advisory states that according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "there is a high level of respiratory viruses nationally,

specifically COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and influenza (flu), with the highest levels of hospitalization from the flu in over a decade for this time of year."

Data provided through the end of November 2022 shows an estimated 8.7 million illnesses, 78,000 hospitalizations, and 4,500 deaths from flu so far this season and COVID-19 hospitalizations have been steadily increasing during the holiday season.

The continued shortage of health workers is contributing to this winter being a difficult one for illnesses. From pre-pandemic, there were already too few health workers to fill open vacancies, but the problem has exacerbated since the pandemic with health care workers at all levels facing extreme burnout.

The CDC reports a new strain of omicron taking over in the U.S., with about 40% of confirmed U.S. COVID cases now caused by the XBB.1.5 strain, up from 20% in mid-December. The subvariant XBB.1.5 has raised concerns about another potential surge of COVID cases following the busy holiday travel season. At the end of 2022, the CDC projected that in the northeast, about 75% of confirmed cases are reported to be the XBB.1.5 variant.

"We could anticipate rates rising in the winter months, but all reports indicate a larger number of cases than expected," Middleton said. "Our staff reps are reaching out to the membership to make sure all necessary precautions are being taken in the workplace but we are asking everyone to be in touch with either their Shop Steward or Staff Rep with any specific concerns related to a increase in COVID cases or the flu."

It's not clear where this particular version of COVID originated from or if it's any more severe than previous strains.

"Bottom line is that the winter notoriously brings with it a general increase in illness of all sorts so just be aware of your surroundings and what precautions are being taken," Middleton said. "While the union is doing it's best to stay on top of all concerns, we will only know about specific instances if members let us know." ■

