

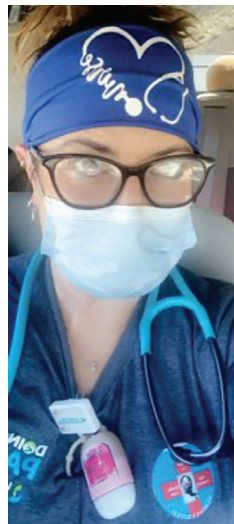


Local 153 News

42 Broadway, Suite 1936, New York, NY 10004 (212) 741-8282

Spring 2021

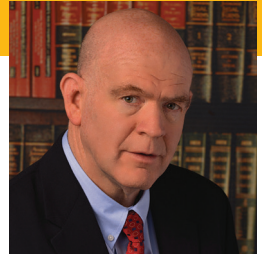
Schulykill Hospital Nurses Fight Back!



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PRO Act Will Empower U.S. Workers



By Richard Lanigan, Business Manager

It has been 83 years since Congress passed meaningful labor legislation that would help workers gain power. I think we can all agree that the time has come to change that.

President Joe Biden understands this. As he said on April 28 during his first address to a joint session of Congress, “Wall Street didn’t build this country. The middle class built this country. And unions build the middle class.”

More than a few studies show that the middle class in our country is shrinking while the number of working poor increases. There is no doubt that this is due to the national decline in union membership.

What caused this decline in union membership? The answer is simple. It is the failure of the federal government to do anything in the last 83 years to modernize labor law. That’s why the PRO Act is such an important piece of legislation.

The PRO Act is an acronym for Protect the Right to Organize, and it would provide protections for workers trying to join a union. It passed in the House of Representatives in March, even garnering the support of five Republicans.

The PRO Act is important because it would help negate the dubious tactics employed by companies and their Republican allies in the 83 years since the last helpful labor legislation was enacted. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumfka explained it this way: “If you really want to correct inequality in this country — inequality in wages, wealth, opportunity and power — passing the PRO Act is absolutely essential.”

President Biden supports the legislation. “Nearly 60 million Americans would join a union if they get a chance, but too many employers and states prevent them from doing so through anti-union attacks,” the President said in a statement on Tuesday, March 9. “They know that without unions, they can run the table on workers — union and non-union alike.”

Biden added, “We should all remember that the National Labor Relations Act didn’t just say that we shouldn’t hamstring unions or merely tolerate them. It said that we should encourage unions. The PRO Act would take critical steps to help restore this intent.”

Here are the things enactment of the PRO Act would accomplish:

- It would prohibit employer interference and influence in union elections. Company-sponsored meetings with mandatory attendance — called “captive audience meetings” — would no longer be allowed, and workers would be able to cast their ballots in union organizing elections at locations away from companies’ properties.
- It would establish strict monetary penalties for companies and executives that violate workers’ rights. Corporate directors and other officers of the company could also be held liable.
- It would allow unions to override so-called “right-to-work” laws that

are designed to cripple unions economically.

- It would stop the stalling caused by companies even after the workers vote to unionize by allowing newly certified unions to seek arbitration and mediation to settle first contracts.

Of course, lots of employers join Republicans in the U.S. Senate and the corporate lobbyists like the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Congress in opposing the measure. That’s no surprise, because in truth they are the same entities that have spent so much time and effort undermining the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the last two pieces of comprehensive labor legislation that actually helped workers win power.

Until the day the PRO Act or similar legislation is passed, unions can only resort to creative tactics and the hard work of organizers in bringing new members into the fold. I’m proud to say that we are doing exactly that at Local 153. In this edition of Local 153 News you will read of several organizing successes our union has enjoyed in just the last few months. You will also learn about the creative tactics we are using in a contract fight we are having in Pennsylvania for nurses that are part of a 750-member group that has affiliated with Local 153, the complete story of which we will cover in our next edition of this magazine.

We earnestly hope that Senate Democrats will take the steps necessary to enact the PRO Act — which President Biden has promised to sign into law. But even if that doesn’t happen, you can bet that Local 153 is one union that will continue organizing new members and fighting for fair contracts for those members we already represent!

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Schuylkill Hospital Nurses Fight Back!

Nurses at Schuylkill Hospital, located in Pottsville Pennsylvania, have maintained strength and determination during difficult contract negotiations with Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN). The Schuylkill Hospital Collective Bargaining Agreement expired on March 31.

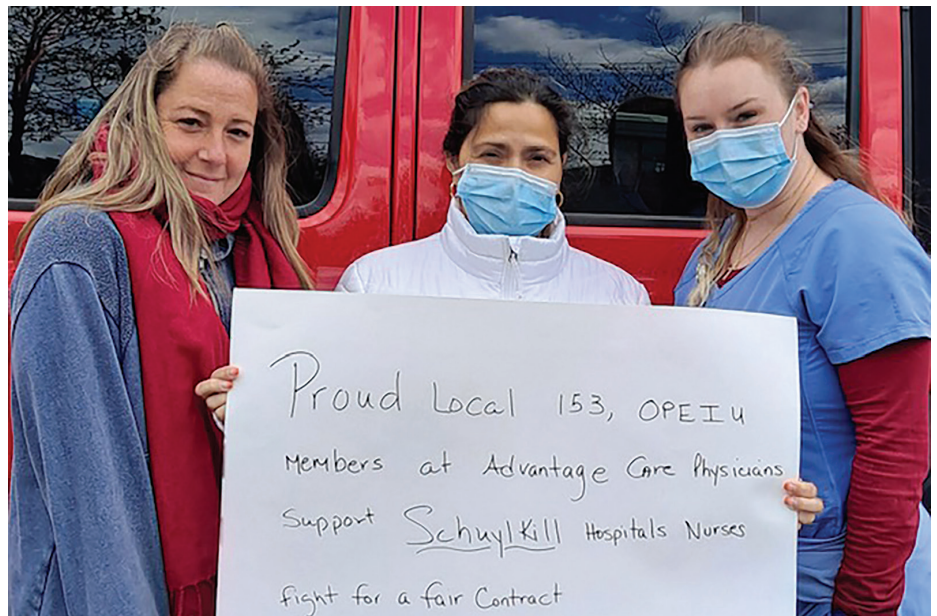
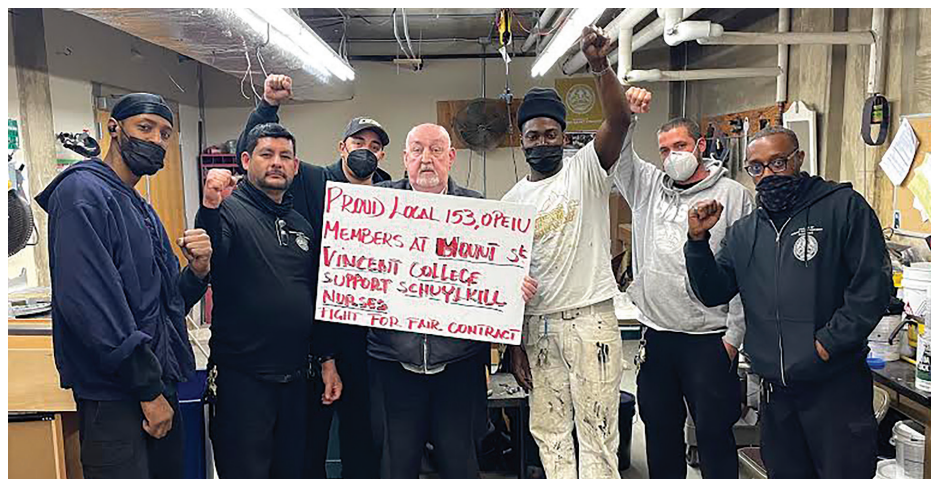
“Management came to negotiations with an aggressive stance to silence the nurses and bust the union,” said Local 153 Senior Business Representative Seth Goldstein. “LVHN hired a union-busting attorney to represent management, a lawyer who specializes in what he calls ‘union avoidance,’” Goldstein added.

Management’s demands have included abolishing nurses’ roles on safety and staffing committees and forced overtime, the latter of which is only allowed in emergency situations under Pennsylvania State law. Additionally, LVHN wanted to end bumping, slash employee leave, gut daily overtime, provide only 10 cents per hour annual cost of living increases, discontinue the nurses’ pay increment and cap nurses’ pay.

In response, the nurses at Schuylkill Hospital adopted an organizing model strategy that involves engaging members to fight LVHN’s union-busting concessions demand. For starters, the nurses dramatically augmented their negotiating committee to 13 members and held regular zoom membership meetings at both 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. to provide an accessible platform for union members.

“We have successfully tripled nurse attendance at membership meetings, and an overwhelming majority of our members are now participating in solidarity actions against LVHN,” said Brandee Siegfried, Chief Steward for Schuylkill Hospital Nurses United.

The solidarity actions have had
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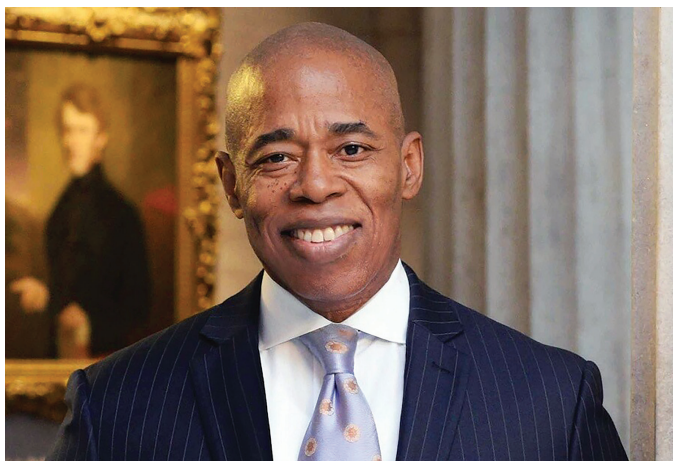


Local 153 members from Mt. St. Vincent, Manhattan College and Advantage Care Physicians expressing support for Schuylkill Hospital Nurses United.

Local 153 Endorses Adams, Johnson and Levine

In this most important political year for New York City, when the offices of Mayor, Comptroller, Borough Presidents and all City Council seats are up for grabs, Local 153 has made some key endorsements. The Democratic primary will be held on June 22, and the general election is on November 2.

Eric Adams for Mayor



Eric Adams

Our union has endorsed Eric Adams for Mayor. Currently the Brooklyn Borough President, Eric Adams has spent his entire adult life in public service. After two decades as an officer in the NYC Transit Police and then NYPD, Adams retired with the rank of captain. He represented New York State's 20th Senate District from 2006 to 2013 before being elected Brooklyn Borough President in 2013. He was reelected to that position in 2017.

Adams was one of the 24 state senators to vote in favor of marriage equality in New York State until it was passed in 2011. Adams was a strong opponent of the NYPD's "stop and frisk" policy and served as co-chair of New York State Legislators Against Illegal Guns.

In his role as Brooklyn Borough President, Adams has been active in making it easier to seek appointments to each of the 18 community boards in Brooklyn. He has used his right as B.P. to submit Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) recommendations to propose additional permanently affordable housing units in the rezoning of East New York. He has proposed other initiatives to create jobs in the community. He has urged New York to build affordable housing on city-owned properties, over railways and on space now used for parking lots. He created the Faith-Based Property Development Initiative to support religious institutions that want to develop property for the benefit of the community, such as affordable housing and other projects.

Adams favors responsible hotel development. He supports expanding special permits city-wide and he recently endorsed plans to convert bad hotels in the outer boroughs into affordable housing, issues of extreme importance to our brothers and sisters in the Hotel Trades Council (HTC). He strongly supports efforts to regulate companies like Airbnb in order to stop the spread of illegal hotels, and he has committed to fund the enforcement of those laws. These positions are also vital to HTC, of which Local 153 has more than 1,500 members.

Adams supports providing childcare to every parent who can't afford it, increasing job-training programs and prioritizing investment in poorly performing school districts. He plans to extend the reduced fair metro card, create more bus routes and invest in electric buses.

In his career in public service Adams has repeatedly demonstrated unqualified support for working men and women and the unions that represent them. Considering his track record and his position on issues of importance to Local 153, he clearly deserves our union's support.

Local 153 endorses Eric Adams for Mayor of New York and we urge our members to help support his candidacy.

Corey Johnson for Comptroller



Corey Johnson

Currently Speaker of the New York City Council, Corey Johnson has consistently demonstrated his support for labor unions and their members. He was first elected to the City Council in 2013, and he has been a leading advocate for criminal justice reform, LGBT rights and women's issues since then.

Local 153 Endorses Adams, Johnson and Levine

In an innovative and important step to improve the health of the children of New York City, Johnson introduced legislation that required the NYC Department of Education to regularly report on student health services in public schools, thus ensuring that such services are adequately serving students. The bill became law in 2016.

A consistent advocate for renters' rights, Corey Johnson was the prime sponsor of legislation declaring a housing shortage emergency in 2015. This forced rent stabilization laws to be extended.

In response to a growing trend of hotel rooms being converted into luxury condominiums, Johnson introduced legislation to limit the number of condo conversions hotel owners can make. The legislation's goal was to protect jobs in the hotel industry that employs more than 1,500 Local 153 members. The bill became law in 2016.

As City Council Speaker Johnson has repeatedly displayed strict concern for NYC budget issues, a factor that merits strong consideration for his candidacy for Comptroller. He takes public service quite seriously, as evidenced by his arrest in Albany for joining sit-ins to force Republican State Senators to vote for laws helping renters. He has wide support from other labor unions besides ours, and he has courageously and publicly discussed his battle with depression, exhibiting a candor that is still too rare among public officials. Local 153 is proud to endorse his candidacy for New York City Comptroller.

Mark Levine for Manhattan Borough President

New York City Councilmember Mark Levine represents the 7th District in Northern Manhattan. He has been very supportive of FCT members who lost the use of Montefiore services through their United Health Care coverage. He serves as Chairperson of the City Council's Committee on Health and as a member of the Progressive Caucus. He is a leader on many issues including housing, education, economic justice, transportation, and environmentalism.



Mark Levine

As a member of the City Council Mark Levine has been a powerful advocate for addressing inequality in New York City. As an example, he successfully pushed for greater equity for parks in New York's low- and moderate-income neighborhoods when he was the Council's Parks Committee Chairperson in the 2014-2017 session. He is also a leading voice on affordable housing issues, including the fight to get legal representation for all tenants in housing court.

Mark Levine is a former teacher, bilingually instructing students in math and science in the South Bronx. He founded the Neighborhood Trust Federal Credit Union, and before serving on the City Council he was Executive Director of Teach For America-New York, Executive Director of the Center for After-School Excellence at TASC, and Chairperson of the Traffic and Transportation Committee on Manhattan Community Board 12.

It is obvious that Mark Levine would bring a wealth of community and legislative experience to the office of Manhattan Borough President. Local 153 enthusiastically endorses his candidacy for that position and we urge members to vote for him, Corey Johnson and Eric Adams in the Democratic primary election on June 22.

**Don't forget to Visit Local 153's website:
OPEIU-tristate.org**

Long Awaited Pension Reform Is Here!

On February 27 the House of Representatives passed a bill to provide relief to endangered multi-employer pension plans. The same measure was included in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief measure passed in the Senate on March 5. Since the total relief measure passed in the Senate was different than the one passed in the House, the measure had to go back to the lower chamber for a vote, where it passed by 10 votes, 220-210. It is regrettable to note that one of the differences between the original bills was the enactment of an increase in the minimum wage in steps to \$15 an hour by 2024. Unfortunately the Senate did not have enough support for the minimum wage part of the COVID-19 relief bill so it was removed in order for the rest of the act to become law. After the House passed the same relief bill the Senate passed, President Joe Biden signed it into law on Thursday, March

11, hours before he was to deliver an address to the nation.

The pension reform piece of the COVID-19 bill provides relief for plans in which many OPEIU members participate, including the OPEIU Western States Plan, the Local 153 Pension Plan and other multi-employer plans. It beneficially affects the lives of OPEIU members and retirees throughout the United States.

OPEIU members have been eagerly waiting for this legislation. In his union leadership capacity OPEIU President Richard Lanigan worked diligently in personally lobbying members of Congress to enact this measure. In addition, as a member of the AFL-CIO Retirement Committee he worked directly with other unions for nearly two years to win this reform and secure our members' pensions.

As we have mentioned in the White Collar, on Local 153's website and in social media, hundreds of thousands of union members across the country found that they were participating in pension plans that were stretched to the limit after the 2008 recession, and that many of these plans were less than 10 years from insolvency. Obviously, this condition has only worsened during the pandemic. In the past the Senate would not consider pension relief and instead provided tax breaks to wealthy people and corporations. As one example, the airline industry used its TARP money for stock buybacks.

"From our standpoint this a huge step toward bringing the country out of the pandemic recession," President Lanigan said after the bill was signed into law. "Now, pension relief is here and our members' pensions are fully secure."

President Joe Biden's Statement on the PRO Act



As America works to recover from the devastating challenges of a deadly pandemic, an economic crisis, and a reckoning on race that reveals deep disparities, we need to summon a new wave of worker power to create an economy that works for everyone. We owe it not only to those who have put in a lifetime of work, but to the next generation of workers who have only known an America of rising inequality and shrinking opportunity. All of us deserve to enjoy America's promise in full — and our nation's leaders have a responsibility to deliver it.

That starts with rebuilding unions. The middle class built this country, and unions built the middle class. Unions give

workers a stronger voice to increase wages, improve the quality of jobs and protect job security, protect against racial and all other forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, and protect workers' health, safety, and benefits in the workplace. Unions lift up workers, both union and non-union. They are critical to strengthening our economic competitiveness.

But after generations of sweat and sacrifice fighting hard to earn the wages and benefits that built and sustained the American middle class, unions are under siege. Nearly 60 million Americans would join a union if they get a chance, but too many employers and states prevent them from doing so through anti-union attacks. They know that without unions, they can run the table on workers — union and non-union alike.

I urge Congress to send the PRO Act to my desk so we can seize the opportunity to build a future that reflects working people's courage and ambition, and offers not only good jobs with a real choice to join a union — but the dignity, equity, shared prosperity and common purpose the hardworking people who built this country and make it run deserve.

American Rescue Plan Act Provides Six Months of COBRA Payments

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) provides up to six months of COBRA payments from April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021 for those who lost or will lose their employment-provided medical coverage between November 1, 2019 and September 30, 2021. This provision of ARP can assist Local 153 members who may have lost or may lose their jobs, even temporarily, and correspondingly lose their medical coverage.

In order to receive this benefit you must meet the federal government's eligibility criteria and you must apply for the subsidized COBRA. You must enroll within 60 days from when you receive your updated COBRA notice or April 1, 2021, whichever is later

Here are the eligibility requirements to receive payment for COBRA from the federal government:

- You must have a COBRA qualifying event that is a reduction in hours or an involuntary termination of covered employment between November 1, 2019 and September 30, 2021;
- You must elect COBRA continuation coverage;
- You must NOT be eligible for Medicare; AND
- You must NOT be eligible for coverage under any other group health plan, such as a plan sponsored by a new employer or a spouse's employer.

The U.S. Department of Labor has released a longer list of frequently asked questions about subsidized COBRA, including the rules for eligibility. You can read these frequently asked questions at the DOL's website by clicking on the link below:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/EBSA/about-ebbsa/our-activities/resource-center/faqs/cobra-premium-assistance-under-arp.pdf2>

Even if you enrolled in another health plan through Obamacare, MetroPlus or BlueCross BlueShield, etc., you are eligible to receive subsidized COBRA. But please remember that if you are eligible and you wish to enroll in free COBRA, you should contact your new insurance provider to cancel that coverage.

In order to receive free COBRA coverage you MUST sign

up with your employer-sponsored healthcare plan. Your healthcare plan provider is required to notify you of your right to enroll in subsidized COBRA by May 31. Contact your Human Resources Department or Plan Administrator directly for more details and watch for mail from your healthcare plan.

If you were covered by an employment-based group health plan on the last day of your employment or a family member's employment (or the last day before you or your family member's reduction in hours causing a loss of coverage), the plan or issuer should provide you and your beneficiaries with a notice of your eligibility to elect COBRA continuation and to receive the premium assistance. The notice should include any forms necessary for enrollment, including forms to indicate that you are an Assistance Eligible Individual and that you are not eligible for another group health plan and are not eligible for Medicare. If you believe you are an Assistance Eligible Individual and have not received a notice from your employer, you may notify your employer of your request for treatment as an Assistance Eligible Individual for periods of coverage starting April 1, 2021. If you are an Assistance Eligible Individual, the ARP provides that you must be treated as though you have paid in full the amount of such COBRA premium from April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021.

If you apply for subsidized COBRA and qualify, you do not have to pay any of the COBRA premium for the period of coverage from April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021. The premium is reimbursed directly to the employer, plan administrator, or insurance company through a COBRA premium assistance credit. In addition, you will not need to pay any part of what you would otherwise pay for your COBRA continuation coverage, including any administration fee that would otherwise be charged.

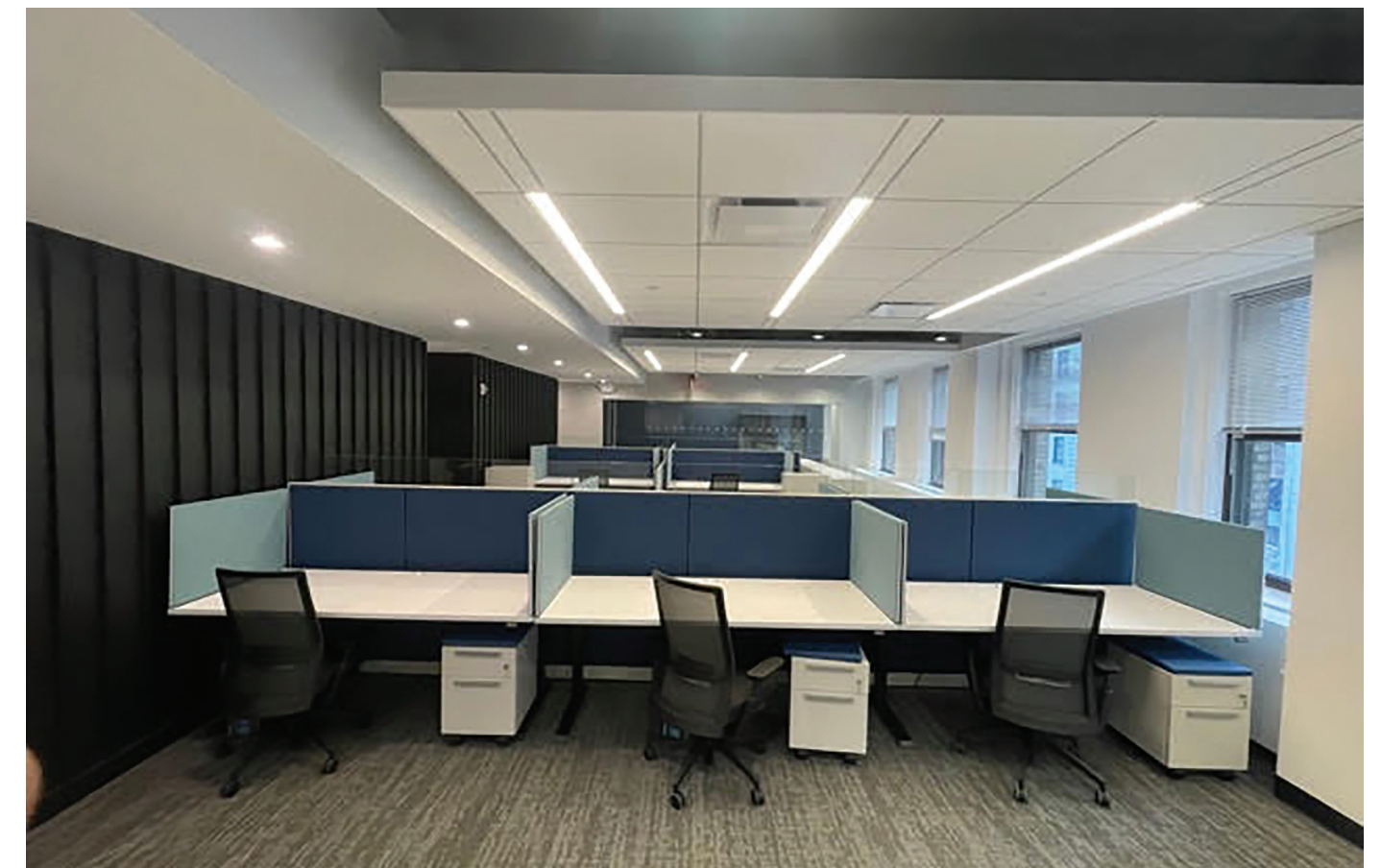
We understand that some of this information may be confusing, but the bottom line is that the American Rescue Plan will subsidize COBRA for people who lost or will lose their employment-provided health coverage anytime between November 1, 2019 and September 30, 2021. Complete details are available at:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/EBSA/about-ebbsa/our-activities/resource-center/faqs/cobra-premium-assistance-under-arp.pdf2>

Welcome to Our New Office!

As we reported to members in our last editions, Local 153's offices have moved to 42 Broadway, Suite 1936. The move will save the union a good deal of money but in no way will it affect our representation of members and the administration of union functions. Local 153, with its new organizer, newly organized bargaining units, organizing fund, field representative office, reformed pension,

email list, website, and the soon-to-come retiree medical savings accounts, is beginning to show its potential through its new office, the photos of which are seen here. All phone numbers remain the same.



First Contract Ratified at City Bar Justice Center



City Bar members meeting via Zoom.

Members of the City Bar Justice Center (CBJC) union have ratified their first contract. Their agreement, which the group negotiated over the course of five months with representatives from Local 153, represents major gains for the union. These included an immediate wage increase of nearly eight percent, along with regular raises, just cause provisions, a mental health stipend for all unionized employees, and increased flexibility in accessing paid time off. The accord was ratified on January 25, 2021.

The CBJC Union includes project coordinators at the City Bar Justice Center, an organization within the New York City Bar Association that provides legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers. Project coordinators at the City Bar Justice Center voted unanimously to unionize and joined OPEIU Local 153 on May 21, 2020, to address issues including extremely low salaries and problems in salary and promotions. Their new contract provides immediate salary increases upon ratification, with annual

raises each May for the life of the three-year contract. In bargaining, the union was also able to win back pay for several employees who had been affected by pay discrepancies based on race — an issue the workers discovered last year, and which spurred their union efforts.

The mental health stipend, too, represents a significant gain for the workers, who regularly interface with clients who have faced trauma. Leah Susman, a project coordinator and member of the union's bargaining committee, notes, "The mental health stipend was a huge win for us because we work with low-income, marginalized clients who have experienced substantial trauma. Our role requires emotional space and empathy. When we're confided in, we can't just turn off our feelings and leave our vicarious trauma in the office. The stipend will allow us to dig into how our clients' stories affect us so that we can continue to show up for them and for ourselves."

The project coordinators faced dismissive attitudes from City Bar Justice Center management when they tried to address these issues without a union. Logan Campbell, another project coordinator and bargaining committee member, said, "When we met with management they fixed the unequal pay issue but we were widely dismissed on all the other matters we brought up. We needed union representation to make sure racist pay practices didn't happen again and to force management to listen to the other issues." With a union and their first contract, workers at the City Bar Justice Center were able to push for necessary changes to their compensation and working conditions.

"We congratulate Local 153 Organizer Dana Kopel for her work organizing these non-profit employees and assisting in negotiations," Business Manager Richard Lanigan said. He added that Senior Business Representative Seth Goldstein played an important role in negotiating the first contract along with members at CBJC, and emphasized that the union is working hard organizing employees at other non-profits. Employees interested in forming a union at their nonprofit organization can learn more by contacting Nonprofit Employees United at nonprofitemployeesunited.org

BioBus Employees Join Local 153

Employees at BioBus recently voted unanimously to join the Local 153. The bargaining unit includes community scientists, drivers, workers in development, IT, and more. Employees spent four months building strength among coworkers before filing for an election in December 2020. On January 29, the group won union representation and the right to collectively bargain. They will join thousands of nonprofit employees across the country represented by OPEIU's Nonprofit Employees United (NEU).

BioBus, a science education nonprofit, works to help minority, female, and low-income students across New York City explore and pursue science through mobile labs, internships, and support with scientific research projects. Employees at BioBus began organizing their union in September 2020, looking to improve compensation, increase professional development opportunities, and have a say in standardizing work procedures at the growing organization. Li Murphy, a community scientist at BioBus and

a member of the union's organizing committee, says, "Unionizing allows our non-managerial staff to give a collective vote of confidence in the organization's future. We now all have the logistical and legal grounds to lift each other up and hold each other accountable to our mission-centric work."

The newest members of Local 153 are celebrating their unanimous victory and the protections and bargaining rights they've gained by unionizing. Marina

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BioBus Employees Join Local 153

Continued from page 10

Delgado, another community scientist and organizing committee member, notes, "I'm so excited to feel valued fully as a member of this organization — and to enact the same protections for every member regardless of their education level or anything else."

As the workers prepare to negotiate their first contract, they are looking forward to building a more sustainable, equitable workplace. Li Murphy says, "Long-term equity and security for our staff who directly support and are embedded in the communities this organization serves are my big priorities as I think about the voice I have in this first contract."

OPEIU Local 153 is excited to welcome employees from BioBus into its membership that spans the tri-state area. The newest union members at BioBus strengthen the growing network of nonprofit workers joining OPEIU in Nonprofit

Employees United (NEU). The union also represents employees at the City Bar Justice Center, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Casa Latina, and the ACLU of Maryland.



Local 153 members employed at BioBus.

New York City Anti-Violence Project Unionizes with Local 153!

A successful card check in April has led employees at the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) to receive voluntary recognition for the union they have chosen, Local 153. The bargaining unit is comprised of attorneys, clinicians, paralegals, community outreach specialists, and other employees who had spent six months building strength among co-workers before requesting voluntary recognition from AVP management. The successful card check means that the group has won union representation and the right to bargain collectively, joining thousands of nonprofit employees across the country represented by OPEIU's Nonprofit Employees United (NEU).

AVP is a nonprofit organization that provides education, advocacy and counseling to queer, transgender and HIV-affected communities and allies. Employees at AVP began organizing their union last summer, following several years of discussions about ways to improve their working conditions and, more recently, threats of layoffs at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; Unionizing

enables them to increase transparency, improve compensation and put in place support structures and professional development opportunities that will allow staff to better serve their communities.

"We are thrilled to win our union!" said Elliot McCullough, a clinician and a member of the union's organizing committee. "We are not just employees of the LGBT Anti-Violence Project — many of us are part of the same community we work with and are survivors of violence ourselves," he added. "We cannot say we are committed to ending all forms of violence without starting in our personal spheres."

The newest members of Local 153 are celebrating their overwhelming victory and the protections and bargaining rights they've gained by unionizing. Isaac Dwyer, a paralegal and another organizing committee member, said, "NYC AVP is a mission-driven organization, and we work here because we believe in the necessity, the gravity, and the urgency of what we do. We also believe that we do our best work when we meet and hold space for

our own needs. Unionizing with OPEIU Local 153 will help us advocate for and fulfill those needs so that we can do at our best the work we are here to do."

As the workers prepare to negotiate their first contract, they are looking forward to building a more sustainable, equitable workplace — one that better reflects the values of AVP.

"LGBTQ and HIV-affected communities especially need strong labor protections, and we're excited to move to the bargaining table!" McCullough added.

OPEIU Local 153 is excited to welcome employees from the New York City Anti-Violence Project to its membership that spans the tri-state area. The newest union members at AVP strengthen the growing network of nonprofit workers joining OPEIU in Nonprofit Employees United (NEU). The union also represents employees at the City Bar Justice Center, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, BioBus, Casa Latina, and the ACLU of Maryland.

Schuylkill Hospital Nurses Fight Back!

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an impact. The nurses collectively filed petitions with LVHN to oppose mandatory overtime. In March they held a sticker day, and when the employer unlawfully directed the employees to remove the stickers they began a weekly "Wear Red Wednesday" to demand a fair contract. Chrissy Newton, a member of the negotiating committee, praised Wear Red Wednesday and said, "Union and non-union employees have all been wearing red in support of our proposal that LVHN invest in Schuylkill Hospital to provide safe staffing, maintain patient quality care, and negotiate fair pay."

On May 13, 2021, the Schuylkill Hospital Nurses, SEIU, and community groups gathered to remember patients lost to Covid-19 and to demand legislative action to improve patient care. The

nurses held a vigil in front of the office of Pennsylvania State Representative Tim Twardzik who initially trumpeted safe staffing legislation but after getting

elected abandoned his support and instead joined LVHN's Board of Directors for Schuylkill Hospital. Representative
Continued on page 13



Members of Schuylkill Hospital Nurses United holding a vigil in front of the office of Pennsylvania State Representative Tim Twardzik.

Functioning During the Pandemic

As we explained in our last edition of Local 153 News, the union has functioned effectively during the pandemic. Workplace grievances have been handled, new shops have been organized, contract negotiations have taken place, etc. Here, the Local 153 Executive Board functions effectively, holding its monthly meeting through Zoom.



Schulykill Hospital Nurses Fight Back!

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Twardzik is a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Safety Committee, which has oversight on patient care legislation.

“We held our vigil in front of Representative Twardzik’s office to call out his hypocrisy for running for office promising to support safe staffing and then forgetting his obligation to deliver quality patient care to the Lehigh Valley community,” Siegfried said, She called on Twardzik to support the nurses’ objective of winning a fair contract.

Schuykill Hospital Nurses United, OPEIU, Local 153 has filed unfair labor

charges with the National Labor Relations Board against Lehigh Valley Hospital-Schuylkill and the joint-employer Lehigh Valley Health Network. According to the charges, nurses were directed to remove their pro-union stickers by management that cited a work rule prohibiting union stickers and buttons. However, Siegfried pointed out the hypocrisy that LVHN permits employees to wear other pins. Region 4 at the National Labor Relations Board, located in Philadelphia, is expected to make a decision on the charges in the next few weeks.

The nurses’ organizing strategy has provided successful results at the

bargaining table. LVHN has pulled back all of its non-economic concessionary proposals. Management also retreated on its demand to gut nurses’ overtime. The nurses also won improvements in bereavement leave, family leave, and unpaid lunch coverage, and they gained strong Protest of Assignment language.

There are still major differences with LVHN on health insurance, pay, and safe staffing, But Newton says, “If we stay strong, united, and engaged we will be successful in raising the standard of care for our patients and we’ll achieve a fair and equitable contract.”



Here are some of the members of Schuykill Hospital Nurses United on a “Wear Red Wednesday.”

FEMA Will Help Pay Funeral Costs for COVID-19-Related Deaths

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is now providing financial assistance for funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020 for deaths related to the coronavirus (COVID-19). This program has been made possible under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The policy has been finalized and FEMA is now moving rapidly to implement the funeral assistance program nationwide.

“At FEMA, our mission is to help people before, during and after disasters,” said Acting FEMA Administrator Bob Fenton. “The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense grief for so many people. Although we cannot change what has happened, we affirm our commitment to help with funeral and burial expenses that many families did not anticipate.”

Here are the requirements to be eligible for COVID-19 funeral assistance:

- The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020 for a death attributed to COVID-19.
- If multiple individuals contributed toward funeral expenses, they should apply under a single application as applicant and co-applicant. FEMA will also consider documentation from other individuals not listed as the applicant and co-applicant who may have incurred funeral expenses as part of the registration for the deceased individual.
- An applicant may apply for multiple deceased individuals.
- The COVID-19-related death must have occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
- This assistance is limited to a maximum financial amount of \$9,000 per funeral and a maximum of \$35,500 per application.
- Funeral assistance is intended to assist with expenses for funeral services and interment or cremation.

Before contacting FEMA applicants are urged to start gathering the following documentation:

- An official death certificate that attributes the death to COVID-19 and shows that the death occurred in the United States. The death certificate must indicate the death “may have been caused by” or “was likely the result of” COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms. Similar phrases that indicate a high likelihood of COVID-19 are considered sufficient attribution.

- Funeral expense documents (receipts, funeral home contract, etc.) that include the applicant’s name, the deceased individual’s name, the amount of funeral expenses and dates the funeral expenses were incurred.
- Social Security number for the applicant and the deceased individual.
- Date of birth for the applicant and the deceased individual.
- Current mailing address for the applicant.
- Current telephone number for the applicant.
- Location or address where the deceased individual passed away.
- Information about burial or funeral insurance policies.
- Information about other funeral assistance received, such as donations.
- CARES Act grants and assistance from voluntary organizations.
- Routing and account number of the applicant’s checking or savings account for direct deposit, if requested.

If you think you qualify for reimbursement for funeral and/or burial expenses related to deaths from COVID-19 you should call FEMA toll-free at 844-684-6333. By calling this number you will be able to get a COVID-19 Funeral Assistance application completed with help from FEMA’s representatives. Multilingual services will be available.

With more than 560,000 COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. since January, 2020, it should be no surprise that FEMA will be experiencing high call volumes that are causing some technical issues. Some applicants are reaching operators, while others are receiving a busy signal. FEMA is working to correct the technical issues and advises that if your call was not able to connect, you should try calling again later. Those who get busy signals should not worry because there is no deadline to apply.

If you would like to learn more about the program you can see a FEMA video at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgvN_9m58Z0

FEMA has also provided a website with frequently asked questions about the program. You will find it here: <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance/faq>

Local 153 Membership Benefits

▶ DEATH BENEFIT

\$5,000 Death Benefit + Additional \$2,000 OPEIU Total \$7,000.

\$5,000 AD&D Benefit + Additional \$2,000 OPEIU Total \$7,000. (Death by accident total \$14,000).

Eligibility – Membership in good standing with payment of dues for 12 months during the last 14-month period prior to death, exclusive of the month of death.

For more information, please call 212-741-8251

▶ TOWING BENEFIT

Two towing/service calls per year for members and family living in the same household, valued at up to \$80 each. You will need a “producer code” for “plan letter C”.

For information, call 212-741-8270

For towing and service call information, call 800-617-2677

▶ 401 (K) NATIONAL PLAN

OPEIU has established a voluntary 401 (k) program that charges considerably less management fees than standard 401 (k) plans. Members will be able to enroll in this benefit shortly.

▶ STUDENT DEBT REDUCTION PROGRAM

Students with \$10,000 or more of outstanding student debt have an opportunity each year to reduce the amount they owe.

▶ FREE COLLEGE EDUCATION BENEFIT

Members may earn tuition-free an Associate Degree online through Eastern Gateway Community College. The free college benefit provides degrees in Associate of Arts, Associate of Criminal Justice, Associate of Business Management and Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Education, with more free online degree programs to come. To obtain a brochure about this program call Local 153 at 212-741-8282 and press “7” for member benefits.

▶ GENERAL VISION SERVICES “Vision Pass”

Eyeglasses discount packages for you and your family.

Call the union for a “vision pass” 212-741-8250/8251

▶ ENTERTAINMENT

Discount movie tickets (\$8.50/Regal – \$10.25/AMC) and theme park discount tickets such as Great Adventure.

Call 212-741-8261

▶ DRIVER SAFETY CLASS

Accident prevention/defensive driving workshop at discount rate for drivers with NY & NJ state licenses.

Call Victoria at 212-675-3210

Members in good standing can take an online course at a low cost of \$10 with up to 30 days to complete the course. To register, visit Local 153 website www.opeiu153.org.

▶ AFL-CIO UNION PLUS BENEFITS

Discounts for services such as dental, vision, health clubs, legal services, pet and car insurance, car rentals, mortgages, etc.

Visit unionplus.org

▶ WORKING ADVANTAGE

Discounts for theater and events, entertainment, sporting events, shopping, travel, etc.

Visit workingadvantage.com

Create an account using ID#: 924400144

▶ SCHOLARSHIPS

Howard Coughlin, John Kelly Labor Studies, Union Privilege and Lavina Michl Wright with grants of up to \$6,500.

Visit opeiu153.org

▶ DEFENSE FUND

Where an authorized strike is called, members will receive \$290 per week.

▶ UNION SUPPORT SERVICES

For members and their families who suffer with substance abuse, depression or stress.

Call 212-741-8251

▶ PUBLICATIONS

Steward Update, Local 153 News and OPEIU’s White Collar.

▶ RETIREE ASSOCIATION

National Council of Senior Citizens Active on Social & Political Issues.

Call 212-741-8262

▶ EDUCATION FOR UPGRADING SKILLS

Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint Access, Web Design, Business Writing, Job Readiness and Financial Planning. Additional programs are being formed.

Call Victoria at 212-675-3210

Local 153 News

Office and Professional Employees International Union, AFL-CIO
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Your Union Benefits

Learn about your union benefits. Save money on car rentals, restaurants, flowers, gifts and more. Take advantage of benefits like free college, discount auto insurance, the UnionPlus and Union Advantage mortgage programs, free towing, car rental discounts and the UnionPlus credit card. Save money on AT&T wireless, dental, medical and prescriptions. There are discounts on Broadway shows, cruises and amusement parks, too! All this and much more can be found in the Local 153 Benefits Booklet at our union's website: OPEIU-tristate.org

