

SEIU Local 517M E-Former – April 2012

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SEIU Local 517M Constitution Vote and Candidate Petitions

Due to a printing error, there is no space provided for you to sign the back of your ballot return envelope, as instructed. In order to help us verify that you are an eligible voting member, please sign and print your name on the back of the ballot return envelope, in the lower left corner.

Contact the SEIU Local 517M office at 866-517-7348 or 517-482-1737 if you have not received your ballot and need to verify your address. Ballots are due to the SEIU Local 517M Lansing office by April 20, 2012.

Candidate Petitions for the 2012 SEIU Local 517M Union Officers Election are now available on the SEIU Local 517M website at www.seiu517m.org/

School Employee Retirement Targeted by Republicans

On Thursday, March 22nd, Senator Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw) introduced Senate Bill 1040. This bill makes massive changes to the Michigan School Employee Pension System (MPSERS) that greatly shifts costs for pensions and retirement health care benefits onto school employees and retirees. House and Senate leaders have expressed their desire to have the bill move through the process at lightning speed, getting the bill to the Governor's desk by June.

The legislation particularly hits lower-income school employees hard, according to the Coalition for a Secure Retirement, because it eliminates the provision in current law that requires lower contributions for employees whose annual income is \$15,000 or even lower. "Michigan just reduced pension benefits for school employees in 2007 and 2010. We can't continue to erode the pension benefits of people who help educate our children," said Coalition for a Secure Retirement President **John Olekszyk**



"We only work about 9 months and 1 week out of the school year, and we're not eligible for unemployment like we were in the past," said **Betty Nash**, a teacher in the Saginaw ISD Head Start program. "I am the bread winner of my family and this really affects my pay check right now so I can't imagine them taking another 2.9% from us!"

A brief analysis of the Bill can be found at: <http://www.seiu517m.org/2012/03/23/school-employee-retirement-targeted-by-republicans/>

The Coalition for a Secure Retirement is a coalition of school and state retiree and employee organizations. SEIU is a charter member of the Coalition.

Legislature and Governor Take Away School Members' Voice



The Republican controlled Michigan Legislature passed, and Governor Snyder signed, legislation that would restrict the voice of workers by not allowing the automatic deduction of their union dues. The SEIU Local 517M Executive Board discussed the issue at their March 9th meeting and is currently looking at the issue to ensure that the collective voice of the membership is preserved. More information will follow as this issue unfolds.

School Legislation Slams Union's Resources—Tries to Stymie Workers' Voices



By Ray Clover, School and Local Government Region 2 Divisional Vice President from Grand Haven Schools Transportation

When the GOP-controlled Michigan legislature ram-rodged its most recent anti-worker attacks against **school employees**, it did so with absolute knowledge that their actions could potentially silence the only real voice workers had in standing up to budget cuts—their Union. On March 16th Governor Snyder signed the GOP-sponsored vote that made it illegal for school districts to deduct union dues from school employees. Basically, the GOP told school workers—“hey, you want to keep your union—then sit down every month and write them a check!”

School employees can no longer authorize their districts to automatically deduct union dues from their paychecks—a direct assault on the financial stability of public sector unions across Michigan. No Union=No Voice; No Voice=continuous assault on wages, insurances and retirement plans. And it didn't take long. The same week that the GOP outlawed school employees' right to deduct union dues, they introduced HUGE changes in the School Retirement Plans—a move they say was “purely coincidental”.

This union dues legislation was just a chicken's way out for not having to actually take a roll call vote on “Right To Work” legislation. No, that would be an absolute frontal assault, and this legislature has proven many times that they are better at killing off through their “thousand cuts” theory. There have been over forty bills introduced—many of them already rammed through, that attack working men and women in this state.

And Governor Snyder still wonders why a massive coalition of Unions and other progressive organizations has started a ballot petition drive to restore and protect workers' rights in this state—PROTECT OUR JOBS. (www.protectourjobs.com.) It's not that he doesn't get it—he's a pretty smart guy. It's that he doesn't fully understand why we can't just all get along through “positive persistence”.

Well, let's not let them pull this off. Let's not let them silence our voices. We will fight this action in the courts as well at the ballot box. But, in the short time, we need your help. SEIU staff and leaders will be meeting with you in the next few weeks to encourage you to sign up for automatic dues payments through bank draft, credit cards, and any other reasonable method that proves to the GOP in this legislature that they can't take your rights away without a fight.

Let's not let them win by trying to drive your Union out of business. Please tell your bargaining unit leader—"I'm ready to fight this assault—I've had enough".

We are all in this together—we will solve this together. And, in the end, we will all win together.

Proposed Bylaw Change for Human Services Support Unit

The Human Services Support Unit Board has approved, with a two-thirds majority vote of the Unit Board, to amend the HSS By-laws to reflect the same language as the SEIU Local 517M By-laws. The proposed change reduces the length of time a member needs to be in dues status to run for a Unit Officer position. According to Article IX of the HSS Unit By-laws, amendments are passed by the Unit Board and then, after at least 30 days' notice to the membership, placed before the SEIU Local 517M Executive Board for ratification. This vote will take place at their May 18th meeting. Please click on the link and read the full details:

<http://www.seiu517m.org/files/2012/04/DOC003.pdf>

Taylor Election Support Acknowledged

By Kathie Fields, Taylor Schools Unit President

On March 15, 2012, a Gratitude Dinner honoring a local business and campaign workers was held at the Taylor union hall. Election workers were acknowledged for their dedication to the SEIU Taylor School membership, going over and above in support of their bargaining unit during all elections.



A lasagna dinner catered by the Taylor School District Food Service department Director and Support Staff was served at the event. The guests of honor were **Mr. Bob Armstrong**, **Mr. Mark Klar**, co-owners of the Sax Savemore store located in Taylor and the election workers. **Mrs. Beth Iverson** Superintendent of the Taylor School District was also in attendance. *(picture L-R: Bob Armstrong, Kathie Fields, Mark Klar)*

Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Klar, as well as the Sax employees, were honored with a plaque from the support staff of the Taylor School District for their generosity and involvement in the school district and community done in conjunction with Local 26M.

The evening was a huge success.

The Arizona Republic News - Arizona pension law ruled unconstitutional

by Michael Kiefer on Feb. 03, 2012, under Arizona Republic News

A Maricopa County Superior Court judge has ruled that a law changing the contribution that state employees make to their pension funds is unconstitutional.

Senate Bill 1614 went into effect July 1, increasing the percentage of employees' contributions to the Arizona State Retirement System from 50 percent to 53 percent.

It was a cost-cutting move, intended to cut \$60 million from the state budget. But seven schoolteachers sued.

Judge Eileen Willett noted in her ruling that the state Constitution describes the public retirement system as a contractual relationship between the state and its employees and that state statutes forbid laws "impairing the obligation of a contract."

"When the plaintiffs were hired as teachers, they entered a contractual relationship with the State regarding the public retirement system of which they became members," Willett wrote. "Their retirement benefits were a valuable part of the consideration offered by their employers upon which the teachers relied when accepting employment."

Donald Peters, the lead attorney for the teachers, said, "The judge found that the state has to abide by the promises it made to its employees."

A spokesman for the Arizona State Retirement System said the organization will review the decisions and its options with the Attorney General's Office before deciding whether to appeal the decision.

Anticipating this ruling, key Republican lawmakers this session have proposed rescinding the hike. It could be addressed in the budget, which lawmakers are still crafting, or via legislation.

House Bill 2264 would return to the previous funding system of a 50-50 split between the state and its workers.

It also would require the state to refund to public employees any contributions made this year in excess of 50 percent.

The bill passed the House Employment and Regulatory Affairs Committee, but it still needs a hearing before the House Appropriations Committee.

Retiree Update



By Mary Charley, Retiree Liaison

On March 22, 2012, the SEIU 517M Retiree Program held the second meeting of the Lansing area retirees. Seventeen retirees and three guests attended the meeting. The agenda included a discussion on the pension tax and financial planning with the pension tax. The handouts from the meeting will be posted on the SEIU 517M website in the Retiree section. We will continue to meet in Lansing every 2-3 months while the Retiree Program is still under development. To include the SEIU 517M retiree members around the state, we will try to make all informational materials, and possibly a recording of the meetings, available on the website. Though the meetings are currently in Lansing, they are open to all SEIU 517M retiree members.

Fight for a Fair Economy Update - New Solutions Work

By Maralyn O'Brien, New Solutions Director

SEIU New Solutions 2.0 is a shared 517M and Michigan Corrections Officers 526M program to help change the narrative on public employees about finding efficiencies in the workplace and engaging the community around the important work our members do. We are focused on the following five projects:

Saginaw: City efficiencies on composting and trash pick up. Passing a citywide ordinance for collecting new revenues on foreclosed properties. Building a template for other cities to follow, and helping launch a member-driven new solutions program in Flint.

State Employees: Going on offense through legislative strategy with member lobbying on more transparency with department contracts. Organizing a coalition to question what is being done with taxpayer dollars with private contracts.

UIA: Engaging members through surveys and worksite visits to identify best recommendations for improving the agency. Establishing bi-monthly new solutions meetings with the Director.

Privatization: Member to member canvassing in targeted legislative districts for grassroots pressure against prison privatization.

Fight for a Fair Economy: Organizing tax day actions on April 17th and participating in the GE Shareholder Spring on April 25th.

There are multiple ways you can engage:

April 17th: Join a tax day action in your community or organize your own!

April 25th: Protest at the Good Jobs Now shareholder spring in downtown Detroit.

May 2nd: SEIU annual lobby day in Lansing (RSVP on the 517M website).

If you have questions, contact Member Leadership in Action Director Marianne Woods at rep517@aol.com.