

SEIU Local 517M

Michigan Public Employees



SEIU Local 517M E-Former September 2012 Edition

Lead, Unite, Fight – Win For the 99%!

In this Issue:

Greetings to all Members of SEIU Local 517M
Update on the Collective Bargaining Ballot Proposal
Court Rules School Retirement Contribution Unconstitutional
Update on Unemployment Agency Layoffs
GOING ON OFFENSE – Case Studies and Lessons Learned in SEIU's Fair Economy State Projects 2011–2012
AFRAM Central Region Leadership Conference
New State of Michigan Blue Cross Links on Website
Montrose School Members Ratify New Contract
2012 Detroit Labor Day Parade
No Romney Economy: The "All in to Win" National Day of Action
Union Issue Blog Started

Greetings to all Members of SEIU Local 517M



By Phillip Patrick
Executive Director

Throughout this summer, I have jumped right in to the fray, fighting to maintain the rights that collective bargaining has allowed working people to experience dignity in the workplace and in the community. I respect the work of all of the members I am privileged to serve on a daily basis. The leadership at Service Employees International Union Local 517M has been striving hard in the last two months to keep all of our members informed on the vastly changing information coming out of the Lansing Capital by way of legislation that affects all of our membership, public, school, and local government members alike. This election year has brought about many strains upon our families. The costs associated with rising food prices, gas prices, and other energy bills have been troubling. Working families have been under relentless attack by the very nature of the policies that have been coming out of Lansing by our Michigan legislators.

As many of you already know, recent notifications regarding layoffs within the Unemployment Insurance Agency have been implemented or will be occurring very soon. Our schools and local government members have taken additional cuts in pay and/or benefits through tough and grinding negotiations centered on legislation that has drained municipalities of valuable financial resources rendering the services to citizens across our state more difficult to provide in a sustainable way.

SEIU held its 25th International Convention in Denver, Colorado earlier this year; May 26 – 28th. Our delegates unanimously committed to come back and invest and coordinate with progressive allies and conduct member mobilizations strategies in order to strengthen and grow

our labor movement to fight for the 99% everywhere. This commitment was not entered into lightly. It will take a concerted effort on the part of our leaders and membership to increase our effectiveness as advocates for working families throughout our state and nationwide. Our goal to move these programs will be given the appropriate priority because it is vital to our existence as a political force to be taken seriously by lawmakers, faith and community leaders alike.

SEIU Local 517M will seek to push forward on our continuing process developed in May of last year when "New Solutions for Michigan" was released. We still assert that Michigan has the opportunity to respond to its budget shortfalls not only with budget cuts and tax changes but by looking inward and ensuring that state, city and county services are making the best use of available funding. Our state has a budget crisis, but also an opportunity to modernize, create more dedication to delivery of services, look only for value from private sector partners, and build sustainable, high performance operations that Michiganders deserve. We will continue to strongly recommend to the employers that our members must be involved at all levels in serious, collaborative, outcomes-oriented performance improvement strategies; beginning in entities most in need of service improvement.

We took a stance and continue to hold fast to our bargained rights that have been threatened on the legal front. Our Coalition of Unions took on the pension legislation last year and was successful in our litigation. Our state members received their 3% pension contribution in their paychecks in late January 2012. However, the battle continues because our Michigan legislators, a short time later, proposed and passed a law to have state employees contribute 4% to their pension. Our school members 3% pension battle is nearing a resolution, but there is still the possibility for an appeal to be filed by the employer. Keep in mind that these struggles bring about a tremendous pull on the resources of this local. We will not let that reason alone keep us from fighting on behalf of our members.

As we move toward the election in November, I want to point out that this election will have many ramifications for working families in our nation. SEIU Local 517M officers, staff representatives, union representatives, members, and their families, must be mindful to engage ourselves and our families, neighbors, businesses and friends in the making our community a better place to live. **Mary Kay Henry**, SEIU International President, stated at our last convention; "It's time for us to reassert what was instilled in all of us by our families, by our houses of worship, by our schools and by our communities – that we are all in this together. Our greatest responsibility as a movement is to restore a vibrant middle class and to continue fighting for social justice."

Let us all remember that we are in this together. We are a union that is made up of leaders, members, families, neighbors, friends, and faith and community members. Our strength is in our numbers and our commitment to hold fast to our principles to fight for respect and dignity in the workplaces and our communities.

Update on the Collective Bargaining Ballot Proposal

The campaign to Protect Our Jobs made oral arguments before the Michigan Court of Appeals on Wednesday, August 22nd. The Supreme Court of Michigan directed the Court of Appeals to make a ruling by August 27th to decide whether citizens will have an opportunity

to vote on a November 6th ballot initiative that would protect the basic right to collectively bargain. The Court of Appeals, in a 2-1 ruling, voted to remand the ballot proposal back to the State Board of Canvassers for inclusion on the November 6th ballot. An appeal is expected to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Michigan citizens have voted on similar basic constitutional laws in recent years, including amendments dealing with stem cell research, affirmative action and definition of marriage. This initiative is no different. The proposal adds one new section to the constitution and amends another.

Michigan citizens deserve a chance to vote on the proposal. A new website, www.letmivote.com has been launched, urging voters to stand up to the corporate special interests who are pushing the courts to silence their voice.

Collective bargaining brings workers and management together to negotiate fair wages and benefits, safer working conditions and protection from arbitrary decisions by employers. That protects us all.

Court Rules School Retirement Contribution Unconstitutional

On Friday, August 17, 2012, The Michigan Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 in *AFT Michigan et al v. State of Michigan* (COA Docket No. 303702) that the 3 percent retirement contribution for public school employees enacted in 2010 was unconstitutional at both the U.S. and state constitution levels. SEIU was part of this lawsuit on behalf of our school support members who are also affected by this case.

Under the 2010 law, the 3 percent contributions went into a health care trust to help pay for current retiree health care costs.

The Court ruled that the law violated state and federal constitutional prohibitions on impairing contracts and unlawful takings, as well as violating due process rights. The court also noted that the contribution was to help fund current retirees and not towards the current employee's own future retirement benefits.

The state has 42 days to decide whether to appeal to the Supreme Court. If there is no appeal, the accumulated contributions that have been held in escrow since the lawsuit was filed will be returned to the employees.

Update on Unemployment Agency Layoffs



By Amy Davis-Comstock,
HSS Unit President

As reported in the previous E-Former, there are some severe cuts to the Unemployment Insurance Agency. Over one hundred of our brothers and sisters

who held temporary assignments have already had their positions eliminated. Over a hundred more of our permanent members are expected to be laid off by September 28, 2012. SEIU is building a campaign to educate the customers who rely on these services about how the layoffs will impact their access to services. We hope to reduce or slow down the RIF with help from you, the membership.

Another piece of this campaign is to have all our members contact their legislators, both to make them aware of the layoffs and to let them know that we oppose these drastic cuts. Please take the time on your next break or by the end of the day and contact your legislators. The contact information can be found by following this link.

[http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(vdpqkh55oqxdlc450gmovb2y\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=home](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(vdpqkh55oqxdlc450gmovb2y))/mileg.aspx?page=home)

At the bottom of the webpage under "Related Sites" follow the link to "Contact your Representative" or "Contact your Senator." It will take about 5 minutes and by adding your voice to your brothers' and sisters' voices you can make a real difference.

Finally, think about if you or someone you know has used Unemployment Insurance in the past year. If the unemployed worker experienced long wait times, or difficulty with the automated service, these difficulties will be exacerbated by the reduction in force. Please forward these stories to the union. You can contact **Amy Davis-Comstock**, HSS President, at (989) 797-4243.

Watch for more information to come!

GOING ON OFFENSE – Case Studies and Lessons Learned in SEIU's Fair Economy State Projects 2011–2012

In 2011 and 2012, SEIU's Public Service Division provided resources for a range of offense projects in nine states: Oregon, Michigan, Washington, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Florida, Illinois, and special retirement security work in California and Oregon.

Our offensive work began to look at local revenue-raising options. We looked at building support for raising revenue over the long haul as well as making workers part of the solution. In the midterm, we can do things that save government money and help people feel more confident that their tax dollars are being spent wisely by highlighting budget savings and ways to make government more efficient.

This report highlights some of the most successful strategies in our campaigns as well as lessons learned from the challenges we faced. It also takes an in-depth look at our efforts with member education, leadership and action as well as other ways in which local unions worked to build our movement's capacity for the future.

SEIU Local 517M projects are featured on Pages 13, and 20-22. These include the state employee New Solutions work and the Saginaw area New Solutions work.

View the report here: <http://www.seiu517m.org/files/2012/08/onoffensivereport.pdf>

AFRAM Central Region Leadership Conference



On August 17-18, 2012, the SEIU Michigan AFRAM State Caucus held its first ever Michigan AFRAM Leadership Conference in Detroit. The Conference was hosted by the Michigan S.E.I.U. State Council and SEIU Healthcare Michigan. For the past 5 years, AFRAM Caucuses throughout Michigan have been working diligently to develop their caucuses and this leadership conference was the showcase which was used to bring it all home. This was also the first time that S.E.I.U. International representatives, AFRAM National leadership and Central States

Executive Board members convened in Michigan to conduct AFRAM official business.

The Michigan AFRAM State Caucus (M.A.S.C.) is a collaboration of AFRAM caucuses from all four SEIU Michigan State Council locals. The members of M.A.S.C. put together a conference agenda that brought forth issues relevant to both AFRAM members, as well as, SEIU members here in Michigan. At the Plenary Session, which was held at Healthcare Michigan Union hall August 18th, the Protect Our Jobs Initiative was a major topic touched on by several of the presenters. SEIU Local 517M Executive Director, **Phillip Patrick** gave an informative presentation on the Protect Our Jobs Initiative. Included in his presentation was how important this initiative is to everyone and not just unions. City of Detroit Councilwoman and Keynote Speaker **JoAnn Watson** gave the official City of Detroit welcome to our out of town guests. Councilwoman Watson also stressed the importance of supporting the Protect Our Jobs Initiative as well the Homecare act. Councilwoman Watson received several rounds of applause during her motivating and inspiring speech on standing up for the rights of workers and the accountability of public officials.

Other presenters at the conference were **Mr. Lin Teamer** and **Ms. Yolanda Langston**. Mr. Teamer, of Teamer Financial Services, gave a presentation on financial responsibility. He also gave advice to members on their current financial hardships and instructed them in seeking financial assistance. Ms. Langston, 517M AFRAM Vice President, did a presentation on Wayne State University Labor Studies. Ms. Langston, who is a W.S.U. Labor studies graduate and also serves as Education Committee chairperson for the M.A.S.C., gave us important information about the W.S.U. labor studies program and how to attend.

There were a total of 73 participants in the conference. Invited guests that attended were National AFRAM President Rod Bashir from SEIU Local 1 Chicago, SEIU Executive Vice President **Gerry Hudson** and the Director of the SEIU Healthcare Division **Dr. L. Toni Lewis**. They all gave motivating presentations on current issues that could be detrimental to union members. Other invited guests included the AFRAM Central States Executive Board, which held their meeting at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American history in Detroit. There were also AFRAM members from Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio in attendance.

The feedback on the conference has been tremendous, which makes us feel that the conference was a success. Members from all over the Central States and here in Michigan feel this conference has enhanced their leadership skills and brought to light the issues that are negatively affecting us. They also feel good about leaving the conference with plans and resolution to address these issues. Lastly the members of the M.A.S.C. have made a commitment at this conference to work together to improve the quality of life for not just AFRAM members, but for EVERYONE in the SEIU Michigan family.

The M.A.S.C. would like to give a special thank you to those who helped in making this leadership conference a huge success: **Andy Johnson**, AFRAM Central Region Director; SEIU Michigan State Council President **Marge Robinson- Faville**; SEIU State Council Political Director **Fred Miller**; 517M AFRAM Executive Officers **Betty Nash**, Yolanda Langston and **Joey Combs**; Healthcare Michigan AFRAM Executive Officers **Sheila Guinn**, **Robin Brown** and **Johndra**

Atkinson; 517M Staff and Members **Stephanie Teamer, Andrea Valerio, David Corrie, Darliane Greene-Blackmon, Josue Zizi, Melvin McClain** and **Kenneth Baker**; **LaNesha Debarbalaben** of the Charles H. Wright Museum; Lin Teamer of Teamer Financial Services; **Fletcher Bland** of Wayne State University Labor Studies; City of Detroit Councilwoman JoAnn Watson; and the AFRAM Central States Executive Board.

New State of Michigan Blue Cross Links on Website

There is a new link posted under the State Employee Links page on the SEIU Local 517M website dealing with State of Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield issues. There are links announcing Open Enrollment meetings, descriptions of the State Health Plan and Blue Care Network, differences between an HMO and a PPO and more! Check it out at: <http://www.seiu517m.org/my-union/state-employee-specific-links/>

Montrose School Members Ratify New Contract

On August 7, 2012, the Montrose School Bus Drivers concluded several months of bargaining by ratifying a new three-year contract. On a vote of 7 Yes votes to 0 No votes the new Contract was ratified. The new Agreement (7-1-12 thru 6-30-15) was a major victory in avoiding outsourcing. The school board at one point voted to outsource, they only changed their decision after a second round of public comment at that particular board meeting when members spoke against outsourcing. The contract contains increases in personal days and a wage freeze for the duration of the contract. Good job to bargaining team members **Laura Dawson** and **Jayne Bolton** for all their hard work.

2012 Detroit Labor Day Parade



By Amy Davis-Comstock,
HSS Unit President

For all those who missed the chance to walk in Detroit's Labor Day Parade, it was a wonderful way to celebrate labor! We had great weather, great company, and a real treat at the end – Vice President **Joe Biden!** There were floats, thousands of walkers, and some prominent Congress-people were there to march in the parade. Senator **Debbie Stabenow** was there to talk with union members and to walk alongside us. At the end of the parade route, many of us went on to the rally on Michigan Avenue by the Westin Hotel. There were speakers from different unions. Lansing Firefighter **Eric Webber**, and U of M nurse **Mary Ann Beauchamp**, talked about the importance of collective bargaining to protect



training, safety, and staffing levels. Autoworker **Stacie Steward**, who is in a TV ad for the Protect Working Families campaign, was there to speak about the importance of the upcoming election and the ballot initiative. Senator Stabenow gave a powerful speech about the role that unions played in our continuing economic recovery, and the role that Michigan plays in the greater U.S. and world economies. At the end, Vice President Biden spoke to the crowd of several thousand union members. He spoke

about the importance of collective bargaining and the importance of the upcoming elections. All in all, it was a great way to spend Labor Day! View photos at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/54989632@N05/sets/72157631407124894/>

No Romney Economy: The "All in to Win" National Day of Action

As Romney accepted the GOP nomination in Tampa, he was rejected at protests across the nation



SEIU Local 517M Region 1 "All in to Win" member leaders and activists gathered in front of the Saginaw County Republican Party headquarters on August 30th with one clear message: "We Say No to a Romney Economy". SEIU Local 517M and SEIU Local 526M (MCO) members along with community activists took a stand against Romney's policies that would mean more tax breaks for the rich, more American jobs outsourced to China, and more budget cuts on the backs of working families and their communities.

Union Issue Blog Started

Michelle Kaminski, Associate Professor of Labor Studies at Michigan State has started a new blog on a variety of union issues. Michelle has provided training in the past at the SEIU Local 517M Steward Training.

Her first entry is on trade unions and feminism. You can view the blog at: <http://unionwork.wordpress.com/2012/08/17/trade-unions-and-feminism/>



[Join Us on Facebook](#)



[Follow SEIU517M on Twitter](#)