



**SEIU 517M**  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

The **E-Former**

The Official Electronic Newsletter of  
SEIU Local 517M

## February 2021

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### Governor Whitmer State of the State Address Summary

By Jeremy Tripp, Executive Director

On Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, utilizing a live video stream from her Capitol office in Lansing, Governor Gretchen Whitmer delivered her third State of the State Address amidst the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In the speech ([click here to watch](#)) the Governor promised bold action in 2021 to grow Michigan's economy, protect the public health, provide \$500 grants to educators and called for bipartisan action on prescription drugs and local road funding.



In a press release, the Governor also outlined and highlighted the following:

**BIPARTISAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** Governor Whitmer highlighted a number of bipartisan actions she took with the Republican legislature last year, including signing two bipartisan budgets, creating the bipartisan Michigan Reconnect Program, and passing and signing historic Clean Slate legislation to make Michigan's criminal justice system more fair.

**MI COVID RECOVERY PLAN:** Governor Whitmer called on the Michigan Legislature to work with her to pass the Michigan COVID Recovery plan focused on distributing vaccines, getting our kids back on track, supporting small businesses, and jumpstarting our economy. The governor's plan will support small businesses long after the pandemic is over. The governor's MI COVID Recovery Plan includes a call on the Michigan Legislature to permanently extend unemployment benefits from 20 weeks to 26 weeks.

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**STAY SAFE — STAY INFORMED**

[www.seiu517m.org](http://www.seiu517m.org)

[Twitter at: @SEIU517M](#)

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**FUNDING FOR LOCAL ROADS:** Governor Whitmer called on the Michigan legislature to work with her to provide local communities more options to fix local roads and bridges, which has received bipartisan support. Last year, Governor Whitmer announced the Rebuilding Michigan Bonding Plan to create and sustain tens of thousands of jobs and start fixing the damn roads without an increase at the pump. Since then, our hardworking construction workers have completed the I-496 Rebuilding Michigan project in November, with 122 more projects on the horizon, including heavily traveled sections of I-96 in Oakland County, I-69 in Calhoun County and I-94 in Berrien County.

**MI CLASSROOM HEROES:** The governor announced the MI Classroom Heroes grants of up to \$500 each for teachers and support staff. These grants will go out in February, and will help offset some expenses and the extraordinary efforts Michigan’s educators have made throughout the pandemic.

**GOOD JOBS FOR MICHIGAN:** The governor called on the legislature to pass Good Jobs for Michigan legislation to retain and grow our businesses and create jobs. Pfizer was the first business to utilize Good Jobs for Michigan, and did so to build their sterile drug manufacturing plant and create 450 good-paying jobs in Portage - the same Portage plant that the first doses of the vaccine shipped from. Passing this legislation will be good for our families, our businesses, and our economy.

**MI CLEAN WATER:** The governor called on the legislature to pass the MI Clean Water plan, a \$500 million comprehensive water investment in Michigan’s water infrastructure that she announced last year. MI Clean Water will direct dollars to communities for safe, clean water to residents and expanding green infrastructure, and it supports over 7,500 Michigan jobs.

**LOWERING THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS:** The bipartisan Prescription Drug Task Force that the governor announced last year has developed a plan to lower prescription drug costs and create more transparency in how drugs are priced. The governor announced that members of her cabinet worked with bipartisan, bicameral members of the legislature to support legislation that requires transparency, holds accountable those profiting from skyrocketing prices, and makes necessary medications affordable for all Michigan families. She called on the legislature to pass this legislation and send it to her desk.

**FIXING THE DAMN ROAD AHEAD:** The governor announced the “Fixing the Damn Road Ahead” tour to engage with and learn from Michigan voters – whether they’re Democrats, Republicans, or Independents. She will engage with people across the state to focus on what unites us, improve how we talk to each other, and fix the damn road ahead.

To view the governor’s full State of the State address, quotes from the speech, fact sheets on each of her policy proposals, and information on her special guests, [please click here](#).

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

[FACT SHEET: Investing in the State's Water Infrastructure](#)

[FACT SHEET: Strengthening and Sustaining Michigan's Local Roads and Bridges](#)

[FACT SHEET: Prescription Drug Affordability](#)

[FACT SHEET: Michigan's COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution](#)

[FACT SHEET: MI Classroom Heroes COVID-19 Grants](#)

[FACT SHEET: Governor Whitmer's MI COVID Recovery Plan](#)

## SEIU Scholarship Applications Are Now Available

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff

SEIU Local 517M is proud to offer our own scholarship program to help dues-paying members in good standing, their children, or grandchildren with college expenses.

Funding for the scholarship comes from our Annual Scholarship Golf Outing and other fundraising activities by our local units. We hope you are able to participate in any or all of these events throughout the year. Please check our SEIU Local 517M website for our calendar of upcoming events.

Eight \$500 non-renewable scholarships will be awarded to students based on successful completion of the application process and meeting certain criteria. Awards will be made via a lottery system from all eligible submissions. Scholarships are awarded without regard to gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or political affiliation of the applicant. Scholarships are limited to one per household for each academic year.

Applications must be received by May 31, 2021. The winners will be notified July 1, 2021.

For full details and the application, [please click here](#).



## Veterans Rep Member in Action

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff



Veterans Career Advisor Ken Rapleje was spotlighted in the January 2021 edition of the Career Connect Newsletter published by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth. Ken recently provided employment assistance to veteran James Hudson, his wife and son.

The family had recently moved to Michigan from Wyoming and like many veterans, found themselves without jobs or a way to get them. They reached out to Veterans' Employment Services for assistance.

Ken did an initial assessment and was able to secure interview skill preparation and possible employment opportunities. He and his team were able to find employment for James, his wife and his son. He also assisted with paperwork so James could apply for a veteran's financial assistance program.

Well done to Ken and the other Human Services Support unit members helping our veterans and their families during these tough times.

[Click here to read the entire story](#), including a thank-you letter James wrote to express his appreciation for the services he and his family received from Veterans' Employment Services.

## Latest COVID-19 Information is Available on our Website

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff

SEIU Local 517M is working diligently to keep you informed with the latest information on the spread of COVID-19 and the steps taken to contain the virus from the Governor's office and SEIU International. We have dedicated a section of our website as a resource to members containing this information. Please keep checking back for the [latest information on our website](#).

## Executive Director Appointed to Protect Michigan Commission

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff



On January 25, 2021, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed SEIU Local 517M Executive Director Jeremy Tripp to the bipartisan Protect Michigan Commission. Appointees to this Commission represent a diverse array of industries, professions, and backgrounds. The commission will help raise awareness of the safety and effectiveness of an approved COVID-19 vaccine, educate the population of this state, and help protect the health and safety of all Michigan residents.

The Protect Michigan Commission held their first meeting on January 29th and serves in an advisory capacity to Governor Whitmer and DHHS. The new members are tasked with providing public leadership to elevate and reinforce the importance of an approved COVID-19 vaccine, identifying barriers that may impede the acceptance of an approved COVID-19 vaccine by Michigan residents, which includes identifying areas or groups within this state that are likely to experience vaccine hesitancy, and develop an outreach action plan designed to overcome these barriers. The Commission must complete its work and submit a brief final report to the governor by December 31, 2021. Appointees will serve until the dissolution of the Commission and are not subject to the advice and consent of the Senate.

## Local 517M History - SEIU Affiliation

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff

As we continue our 40th Anniversary series on the history of SEIU Local 517M, we look at our affiliation with Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

On February 7, 1981, the Michigan Society of State Engineers and Professional Affiliates (MSSE&PA) Executive Board and Board of Governors unanimously voted to pursue an affiliation with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The affiliation was negotiated by then part-time Executive Director Bus Bigham and would become effective in 1983 when we officially became Local 517M.

This affiliation would allow for financial and staffing support from SEIU as MSSE&PA was in the process of a representation election for the Scientific and Engineering bargaining unit. Support would come in the areas of election campaigning, organizing, and collective bargaining, while retaining autonomy and local control.

There were already two other units in state service that were represented by SEIU at that time. SEIU Local 31M represented the Human Services Support bargaining unit and the Michigan Corrections Organization, SEIU Local 526M represented the Security bargaining unit.

Affiliation extension votes were held in 1985 and 1986. In 1987, a new permanent affiliation agreement was negotiated by full-time Executive Director Phil Thompson and Local 517M President John Polasek with members voting by a margin of 3 to 1 to remain with SEIU.

The affiliation was the first time in the history of the American Labor Movement that an organization comprised exclusively of scientists and engineers entered into an affiliation with a large international union.

Interesting Fact: The local number was selected by the leadership at the time because of the Lansing area code. The M was added for Michigan since there was already an SEIU Local 517.



L-R: The progression of the SEIU International logo starting with the logo of the 1960s-70s during our organization's early years, then the logo in the 1980s - 90s when we organized and ending with the current logo.

## SEIU to Hold National COVID Vaccine Virtual Town Hall Meetings

By Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff

SEIU International is holding four virtual national town hall meetings in February for members to learn about the COVID vaccines - how they work, how they were developed, and how they were tested. Members will be able to submit their questions at registration or during the live question and answer period during the sessions. The town halls will be moderated by SEIU Executive Vice President Leslie Frane and feature Dr. Alicia Fernandez, a professor at the University of San Francisco and general internist at San Francisco General.

You can use this [link](#) to register for all four town halls:

Monday, February 8, 2021 at 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday, February 9, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 8:00 p.m.

## Region 1 Leaders Kick-Off Little Library Book Drive for Students in Saginaw County

By Clint Bryant, SEIU Staff

Members in the School and Local Government Region 1 are uniting to give back to their community with a focus on literacy. Member-Leaders kicked off a month long book drive at Hoyt Library in downtown Saginaw. Throughout the month of February, just ahead of “March is Reading Month” members and community members are asked to contribute books that focus on K-3 reading.

Roberta Oldenburg, Region 1 Secretary is encouraging members throughout the region to donate a new or gently used book to “help broaden the imagination of child.”

“Reading helps to improve our children’s comprehension capacity that is vital to a successful future”, said Oldenburg. “We are committed to our student’s progress and will do all we can to ensure they receive the time and resources they need.”

If you are interested in contributing, you may put new or gently used book in the drop box at the SEIU Region 1 office located at 1420 S. Michigan Avenue in Saginaw. Our goal is to fill 8 little libraries throughout Saginaw County. If you have any questions, please contact the Region 1 office at 989-797-4243.



Pictured Left to Right:  
Member Shazaan Hamilton and Vice  
President of Saginaw Public Schools Unit  
Jeanette Barnett



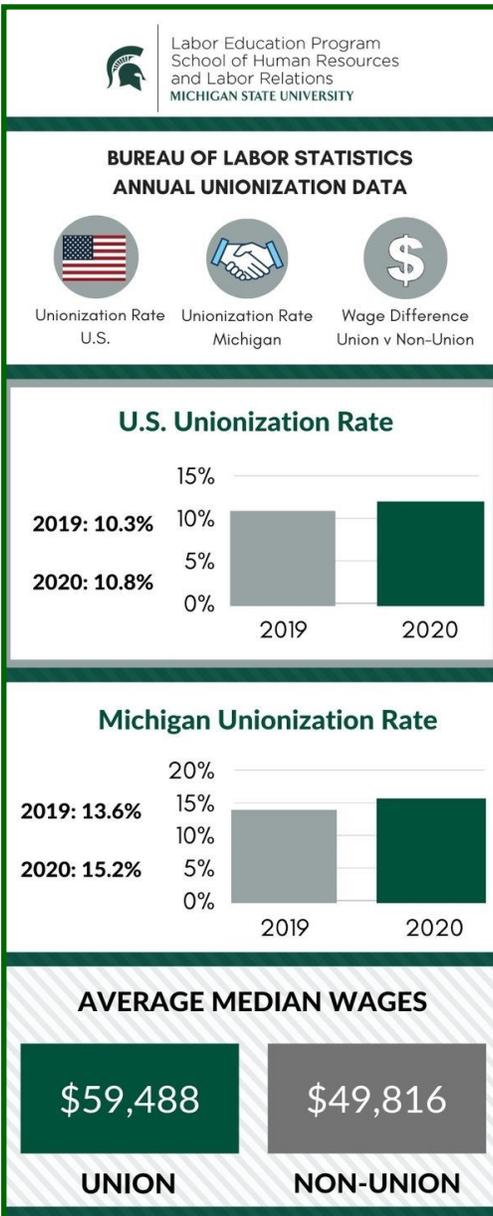
Pictured Left to Right:  
Roberta Oldenburg Regional Secretary and  
Greg Price, Saginaw Public Schools Unit  
Campus Officer

# Department of Labor - 2020 Union Members Summary

Compiled by Dave Corrie, SEIU Staff from Department of Labor Information Supplied by the Michigan State University Labor Education Program

In 2020, the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions was 10.8 percent, up by 0.5 percentage point from 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. The number of wage and salary workers belonging to unions, at 14.3 million in 2020, was down by 321,000, or 2.2 percent, from 2019. Union membership data are collected as part of the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 eligible households that obtains information on employment and unemployment among the nation's civilian noninstitutional population age 16 and over.

Data reflects the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the labor market. Comparisons with union membership measures for earlier years, including metrics such as the union membership rate and the median usual weekly earnings of union members, should be interpreted with caution due to the disproportionately large decline in total wage and salary employment (mostly among nonunion workers) compared with the decline in the number of union members.



Highlights from the 2020 data:

- The union membership rate of public-sector workers (34.8 percent) continued to be more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers (6.3 percent).
- The highest unionization rates were among workers in protective service occupations (36.6 percent) and in education, training, and library occupations (35.9 percent).
- Nonunion workers had median weekly earnings that were 84 percent of earnings for workers who were union members (\$958 versus \$1,144). (The comparisons of earnings in this news release are on a broad level and do not control for many factors that can be important in explaining earnings differences.)
- In 2020, 15.9 million wage and salary workers were represented by a union, 444,000 less than in 2019. The percentage of workers represented by a union was 12.1 percent, an increase of 0.5 percentage point from 2019, reflecting the disproportionately large decline in total wage and salary employment. Workers represented by a union include both union members (14.3 million) and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union contract (1.7 million).
- Among full-time wage and salary workers, union members had median usual weekly earnings of \$1,144 in 2020, while those who were not union members had median weekly earnings of \$958. In addition to coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, these earnings differences reflect a variety of influences, including variations in the distributions of union members and nonunion employees by occupation, industry, age, firm size, or geographic region, as well as pandemic-related labor market effects in 2020.
- In 2020, 7.2 million employees in the public sector belonged to unions. Union membership showed little change in the public sector. Within the public sector, the union membership rate was highest in local government (41.7 percent), which employs many workers in heavily unionized occupations, such as police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

More information on labor market developments in recent months is [available here](#).