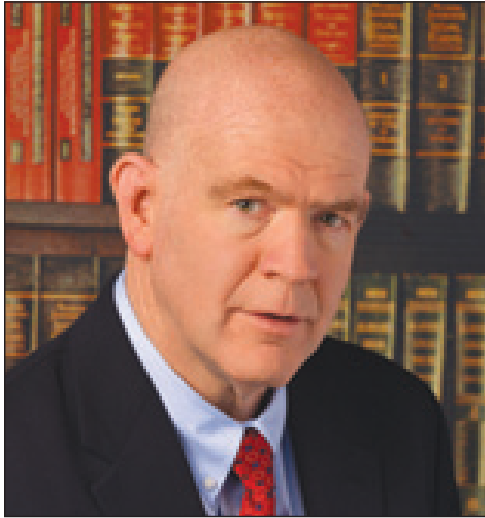


# WHITE COLLAR



## Health Care Workers Deserve More Than Applause

OPEIU health care workers have been short-staffed and overworked throughout the pandemic. The time has come to show our appreciation.



# Why Would Anyone Want the U.S. to Be More Like Hungary?

By Richard Lanigan  
President

Recently, there have been news articles and television programs suggesting the United States should be more like the former communist country Hungary. The New York Times Magazine ran a feature-length article explaining this ideology, “How the American Right Fell in Love with Hungary.” [Oct. 19, 2021, edition]

With all due respect to hardworking Hungarian people, I must ask why anyone would want the U.S. to be more like Hungary? On its face alone it is difficult to take the U.S. and its diverse population of 330 million, millions of square miles of territory and thousands of miles of coastline and compare it with Hungary, a landlocked country smaller than Pennsylvania with a population barely more than that of New York City.

Aside from these differences, why would anyone aspire to live in a country with lower life expectancy, much poorer housing, inferior medical coverage, lower wages and a totalitarian government?

Studies show if Hungary were your home, you would be 24.19 percent more likely to be unemployed than if living under current standards in the U.S. You would expect to die four years sooner than in the U.S. You also would earn more than 60 percent less in wages than you would doing the same work in the U.S. Doesn't it make more sense to compare U.S. living standards to those of an industrialized democracy? Perhaps those of Western Europe or Japan? Wouldn't it be smarter for the U.S. to aspire to a better future instead of a dismal future?

There's more. The Hungarian Parliament in 2018 enacted reform to the country's labor laws. One of those “reforms” allows employers to demand employees work up to 400 extra hours per year in overtime. Even worse, as The New York Times

recently reported, Hungarian employers have up to three years to pay workers for their overtime. It is most revealing to note, at the time the overtime law was adopted, Hungarians were already working longer hours than their Western

neighbors at approximately half the pay. Could this be why an average of 70,000 Hungarians migrate to the U.S. annually?

Why would workers want labor laws that give employers three years to pay for mandatory overtime?

The U.S. was born out of a dream to escape monarchy, to create a land where people were free to pursue happiness and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. These are the foundations of our precious freedom. The founders of the U.S. created a nation where our constitution guarantees us certain rights, and we and our neighbors are free to fight for those rights today and into the future. Free speech and expression are in the country's DNA.

Many of the world's democracies were modeled after the U.S. While democracy isn't perfect, it is the fairest form of government to date.

On the other hand, Hungary's history is filled with despots and communists.

Since the early 1990s, Hungary has been experimenting with the type of government that would work best after the fall of communism. But even its attempts at democracy have been eroded over the last

decade as ultra-conservative leadership gains greater and greater authoritarian control. The fight for equality and justice for all people, while still issues we grapple with here in the U.S., are unwelcome in Hungary, with more and more laws subjecting the citizens to harsh penalties and even imprisonment for attempting to have the rights we take for granted in the U.S.

So why would anyone want the U.S. to be the Hungary of North America? Why should we be lowering our expectations? When these questions are answered honestly, the suggestion the U.S. should become more like Hungary should raise alarm bells. ■

**Why would workers want labor laws that give employers three years to pay for mandatory overtime?**

## Around the Movement

### Union Members Flex Their Muscle to Demand Fair Treatment

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities of our system. Working people are looking at work in a different way. They want safe jobs with flexibility, good health care, sick leave and to feel respected and valued. And, they feel a new sense of power and leverage.

A wave of collective action is sweeping the country as working people are standing up and demanding dignity, respect and fairness on the job. During what has been dubbed “Striketober,” workers at the Kellogg Co., John Deere, Kaiser Permanente, IATSE and others authorized or went on strike over a host of issues, including fair pay, health care and retirement benefits. They could use your support.

### Support Kellogg's Union Workers on Strike

Employees at four Kellogg Co. cereal production plants are on strike to keep their health care and retirement benefits.

For more than 18 months throughout the pandemic, Kellogg's workers around the country have been working long, hard hours to produce Kellogg's ready-to-eat cereals, such as Rice Krispies, Raisin Bran, Froot Loops and Corn Flakes, for American families.

Kellogg's response to these loyal, hardworking union employees has been to demand they give up quality health care, retirement benefits and holiday and vacation pay. The company threatens to send additional jobs to Mexico if workers don't accept outrageous proposals taking away protections workers have had for decades. It also wants to remove the union label from its products.

The company is making these demands as it rakes in record profits without regard for the well-being of the dedicated people who make the products creating the company's massive profits.

In response, at midnight on Oct. 5, 1,400 workers at four plants in Battle Creek, Omaha, Lancaster and Memphis went on strike against the company. They're fighting to keep wage increases due to them, and against company proposals to create a two-tier employment system, where new hires will make less money, have higher health insurance payments, will not earn a pension and will never attain the same status as current full-time Kellogg's employees.

A two-tier system is a devious way for employers to slowly, but surely, take power from union members, their contract and their union. According to the workers' union, the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM), the company is trying to divide the workforce by asking the current employees to sell out the next generation of Kellogg's workers.

The strike at Kellogg's comes just about a month after more than 1,000 BCTGM members went on strike at Nabisco — the first strike at the company in more than half a century. For five weeks, in six key production facilities, workers walked the picket line to demand a fair contract. The strike worked. In September, members overwhelmingly ratified an agreement that includes pay increases, a cash bonus, a boost to employer 401(k) contributions and blocks proposed cuts to workers' health care.

The BCTGM asks you to pledge support for our striking union siblings at Kellogg's. The union isn't calling for a boycott at this point, but there are lots of ways to show support. If consumers and supporters decide not to buy Kellogg's cereals while workers are on strike, that's great, but a more direct way you can help is to visit picket lines and make some noise if you live in any of the four states on strike. You can also donate funds and sign a petition standing with Kellogg's workers. Visit [bctgm.org](http://bctgm.org) for more info.



### IATSE Strike Vote Yields New Employer Proposal

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts (IATSE) held a national strike vote in early October as negotiations with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) stalled.

The nationwide strike vote — the first in the union's nearly 130-year history — gained national attention, as 90 percent of eligible voters (60,000) participated, nearly unanimously authorizing a strike.

The main issue at the heart of the strike vote — voted on by 36 locals — is long, grueling days of work: sometimes 14- or 16-hour days, with days off becoming increasingly rare.

The October strike vote forced AMPTP's hand, and within a few days, they submitted another proposal to the union for consideration. In November, members narrowly ratified the agreement, averting a strike that would have, given the union's powerful showing of unity in their strike authorization vote, shut down most television and film production in the United States.



## White Collar is Getting a New Name

It's been a long time in the making, but OPEIU's membership publication, White Collar, is getting a new name that better reflects today's union and membership.

The new name will be announced soon in an upcoming issue. Look for it and let us know what you think. Feedback can be sent to [frontdesk@opeiu.org](mailto:frontdesk@opeiu.org). Please use the subject line: Letter to the Editor.

## Code for America Staff Join OPEIU, Becoming First 'Civic Tech' Union in U.S.

Staff at Code for America (CfA), a nonprofit organization focused on closing the technology gap between the public and private sectors, are the latest tech workers choosing to be represented by OPEIU's Tech Workers Union Local 1010.



On Oct. 22, Code for America management voluntarily recognized the CfA staff union through a card-check process. Contract negotiations between management and CfA Workers United will now begin.

"Nonprofit and tech workers alike are becoming increasingly aware of the power a union brings them at work," said Brandon Nessen, OPEIU organizing director. "Unionizing gives working people agency to advance not only their own interests, but the mutual interests shared by both staff and management."

Voluntary recognition of their union avoids the often contentious and lengthy process of conducting an election via the National Labor Relations Board. Employers who insist on the election procedure often do so in a way that conflicts with the stated mission, goals and values of their organizations.

"We are pleased Code for America management took the step to voluntarily recognize our union, CfA Workers United, via a democratic card-check process," said Aditi Joshi, who has been with

the organization more than 2 years. "We look forward to working together with CfA management to continue building a culture that empowers all employees to show up to work as their full selves, each and every day."

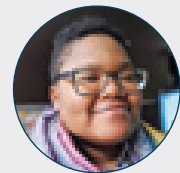
OPEIU founded Local 1010 in January 2021 to raise standards for workers in the tech industry, with a long-term goal of providing all tech workers a better future in their workplaces through collective bargaining. It was created for and run by tech workers, and is formed around a core of engineers, designers, salespeople, product managers, operations specialists, finance administrators, community support agents, trust and safety analysts and every other person who makes tech companies run.

Beginning with its historic win at Kickstarter in 2020, and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, momentum for unionizing the tech sector has grown significantly.

"Our union is creating a space for tech workers to learn from each other, coordinate together and show up in solidarity for each other," said RV Dougherty, a Local 1010 tech organizer. "By doing so, we're building our capacity to run strong campaigns and, above all, win legally binding contracts that can help even out the imbalance of power between tech employees and their employers."

"We are heartened by CfA management's decision to voluntarily recognize their employees' union, and look forward to using the collective bargaining process to work together to realize and reaffirm the organization's core belief that those most impacted by policies should be involved in their design," Dougherty concluded.

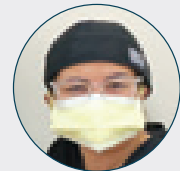
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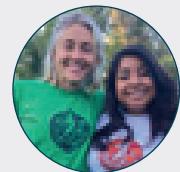
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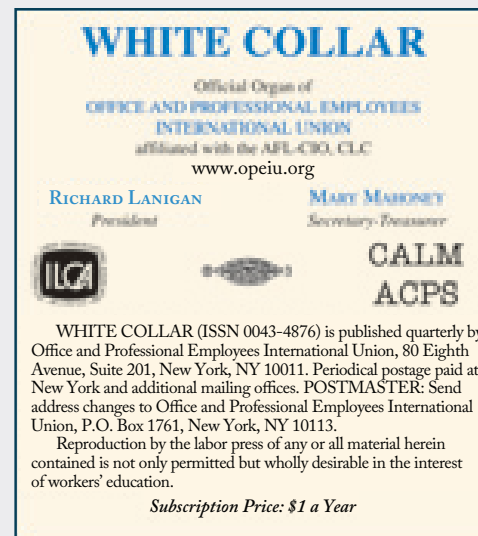


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#### On the Cover:

Members of Local 30 employed at Kaiser Permanente facilities in California rally for passage of AB-650, legislation calling for employers to provide health care workers with COVID-19 hazard pay retention bonuses. The bill failed in the California Assembly, but OPEIU members in California and throughout the country continue to fight for similar measures. See page 14 for more about the challenges OPEIU health care workers have faced during the pandemic and why the time has come to provide these professionals with the compensation they deserve.



## Get the OPEIU App Today

The OPEIU app is available for free download.

It's a great way to stay connected to your union, learn more about your membership benefits, find links to OPEIU's social media networks and much more. Available for free download for iOS devices on the App Store and for Android devices on Google Play by searching **OPEIU**.



## Chelsea Bland Helps Prioritize LGBTQIA+ and Black Voices at Local 2

Chelsea Bland is a full-time unionist, in and out of the workplace. As a union communications professional, she supports the American Federation of Government Employees' communications department. As a member of OPEIU Local 2 in Washington, D.C., she played an active role in developing the local union's internal LGBTQIA+ Committee.



Chelsea Bland

In 2015, Bland agreed to chair Local 2's LGBTQIA+ Committee, taking on responsibility for facilitating the group's mission, structure and programs. "I thought this was an opportunity to become more active inside of our union," she said.

According to Bland, philanthropy, mutual aid and community service form the core of the committee's work.

The COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to many of the programs the steadily growing committee was working on. With support from local leadership, and as vaccination rates climb, however, Bland is planning "to try out different programs and to connect with other queer folks" within Local 2.

The development of the committee, which aims to "go beyond visibility," she said, was made easier with support from local leadership. "Visibility is important, but it's important to set clear goals and objectives to see where you can go beyond it."

Bland is passionate about prioritizing the voices and leadership of Black and LGBTQIA+ people of color within the labor movement and encourages OPEIU members wanting to start their own LGBTQIA+ committee within their locals to contact her for some guidance at [chelseadbland@gmail.com](mailto:chelseadbland@gmail.com).

## Local 105's Jessica Akers is First Woman to Head Arkansas Fed

At just 40, Local 105 Secretary-Treasurer Jessica Akers is one of the youngest labor leaders in the nation and the first woman to lead the Arkansas AFL-CIO. White Collar spoke with her about her experience in the labor movement, her new role leading the state federation and the future of labor in her state.

A decade ago, Jessica Akers began at Working America, an AFL-CIO community affiliate, in Little Rock.

There, she started out as a canvasser, then became office manager and, before long, was in charge of managing 50 canvassers a day knocking on doors for senate races. "Through Working America," she said, "I fell in love with the labor movement and fighting for workers."

Within two years, Working America had moved the office to New Mexico, but Akers decided to stay behind in Arkansas. Soon after, she was hired as political director and legislative mobilizer at the Arkansas AFL-CIO, becoming a Local 105 member in the process. Two years later, when the then-secretary-treasurer of the state federation was tapped to lead the state's department of labor, she decided to run for the open position — and, at age 32, won.

Ascending in July of this year to president of the state fed, Akers said OPEIU's shift to prioritizing organizing is "near to me" and has shaped her outlook on where "we go from here as a state federation."

Akers acknowledges there's quite a way to go. Arkansas is fourth-lowest in the nation in terms of union density — just 4.7 percent of the workforce is covered under a collective bargaining agreement — a fact the state's own economic development agency markets to out-of-state business owners. She feels confident, however, progress is being made.

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission "prides itself on the fact we have inexpensive labor and we're 'right-to-work,'" Akers said. "I have a huge problem with that because I think Arkansas workers deserve better."



Jessica Akers

The long-term picture is more complex, she admitted, but full of opportunities to make tangible differences in the lives of working Arkansans.

Three longer-term projects — expanding the state federation's political education programs, reaching young workers and those in the state's growing digital media and hospitality industries, and strengthening the Arkansas labor movement's collective message — are crucial to the state's hopeful union growth in the coming years, she said. She believes, however, the state's labor movement is ready to take on the challenge with a forward-thinking mission.

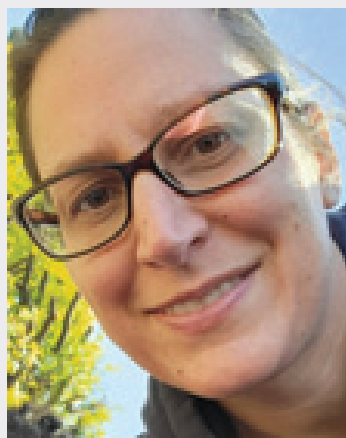
"I think the leaders and delegates who elected me as the first female to lead, and being only 40, shows the labor leaders and labor movement here are, together, dedicated to the future," Akers concluded.



## OPEIU Members, Family Win Union Plus Scholarships

Four OPEIU members and family members were chosen from more than 5,000 applicants to receive a 2021 Union Plus Scholarship, honored for their academic achievement and strong union values.

Nicole Carbine and Jordyn Famimiko, both of Seattle, Edwin Soto Saucedo of Panorama City, California, and Jaquain Scales of Sacramento were among the 199 students representing 37 unions to be awarded scholarships totaling \$250,000. All four are extraordinary individuals who, in addition to excelling academically, make volunteerism and serving their communities a top priority.



Nicole Carbine

Ground, a Seattle-based anti-poverty and social service organization where she has worked the past two years. Previously, she was a family resource coordinator for community-based nonprofit service provider ChildStrive and a community outreach worker for Molina Healthcare of Washington.

Laura Black is the housing stabilization manager and Carbine's supervisor at Solid Ground. She said Carbine is an asset to the Solid Ground community, and she will excel both academically and socially as a leader. "Nicole has an incredible interpersonal skill set and a keen ability to empathize with people from all walks of life with kindness, authenticity and focused attention," Black said. "She highly values and prioritizes racial equity in her decision-making and vision for her work and our community. It is essential we develop leaders like Nicole to build businesses that prioritize social impact with an equity lens."

Jordyn Famimiko, whose mother, Ellena Floyd, is a member of Local 8, was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship. Famimiko plans to major in pharmacy at Florida A&M University. Her decision to pursue



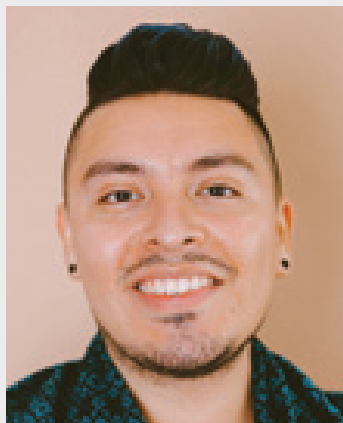
Jordyn Famimiko

a career in pharmacy was influenced by African Americans who impacted the medical and science fields, such as Dr. Charles R. Drew. Famimiko hopes to advocate for healthy lifestyle choices and other measures of preventative medicine. Last year, she was selected to speak at the National Consortium of Secondary STEM Schools Professional Conference. She said her mother's OPEIU membership has inspired her to advocate for others. "The purpose of unions, in the simplest terms, is to uphold basic human rights," Famimiko said. "Understanding what it means to be an OPEIU member has shaped the importance of advocacy within my family, and I will continue to advocate for others going forward."

Therese Tipton, Famimiko's high school principal, said Famimiko is one of the top students she's encountered in her 21 years as a public educator and administrator. "Jordyn exemplifies the characteristics of academic excellence, dedication to improving her community, selfless service to others and leadership," Tipton said. "I have no doubt she will be highly successful at the university level."

Edwin Soto Saucedo, a member of Local 537, received a \$2,000 scholarship. Saucedo began pursuit of a Master of Business Administration at California State University, Northridge, this fall. He hopes to bridge currently existing gaps in the business community that often lead to the working class being overlooked. Saucedo is a contact center representative for the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), for which he has worked since 2017. "I will bring my years of professional experience and community organizing to my classrooms to help enrich our collective learning experience," Saucedo said. "I am committed to becoming an asset in and out of the classroom by sharing my lived experiences, labor union advocacy and the changes I have helped accomplish at SAG-AFTRA and the community at large."

"I have witnessed the passion he has for union organizing and the leadership and respect he has gained from his colleagues," said Jacqueline K. White-Brown, business manager and secretary-treasurer of Local 537. She has gotten to know Saucedo through work he has done in his role as shop steward for the local's members at SAG-AFTRA. "Even in the middle of a pandemic, Edwin has demonstrated his integrity and commitment to his fellow union members, organizing and fighting to ensure their rights under the



Edwin Soto Saucedo



Jaquain Scales

collective bargaining agreement are upheld by their employer," White-Brown said.

Jaquain Scales is a member of Local 29 and received a \$2,500 scholarship. He's studying social work at the Union Institute and University in Cleveland.

"I am very passionate about this line of work and am dedicated to not only pursuing and obtaining this degree, but working really hard for the betterment of the community and society as a whole," he said.

Scales is an access point services specialist at the St. Vincent de Paul Society of San Francisco. "My job is very purposeful to me because I'm the very first point of contact when the homeless population we serve enters our facility," Scales said. "It allows me to get to know people beyond the surface and hear their stories about where they came from and, in some cases, where they want to go in life. I then am able to connect them with other members of our team to further assist them."

The Union Plus Scholarship Program, now in its 30th year, awards scholarships based on outstanding academic achievement, personal character, financial need and commitment to the values of organized labor. Union Plus discount benefits and services are available through your OPEIU membership.

Visit [unionplus.org/scholarship](https://unionplus.org/scholarship) for applications and benefit eligibility.

### DON'T MISS OUT!

## OPEIU Free College Registration Deadlines

Further your education by registering for the OPEIU Free College program. OPEIU members and their families can complete an associate or bachelor's degree completely online for FREE.

Online learning is safe and can fit into your busy schedule. For more information, visit [freecollege.opeiu.org](https://freecollege.opeiu.org).



#### CLASSES START:

Jan. 10 (associate degree)

Jan. 17 (bachelor's degree)

#### New Degree Programs Available

OPEIU's Free College and Bachelor's Degree Completion programs have added new degree programs for you and your family, including RN to BSN, psychology, political science, legal studies, various business administration degrees and others. Visit [freecollege.opeiu.org](https://freecollege.opeiu.org) for more information.

More than 2,450 OPEIU members have saved \$8.6 million in tuition, e-books and other fees through the OPEIU Free College program.

## OPEIU Scholarship Applications Available in January

Check out [opeiu.org](https://opeiu.org) and click on the Member Resources tab to learn more about OPEIU scholarship opportunities.

Annually, OPEIU awards numerous scholarships to further the education of members and their families, and hosts a summer camp just for kids.

2022 applications will be posted at [opeiu.org](https://opeiu.org) in January, as well as on the OPEIU app, available for free download for iOS devices on the App Store and for Android devices on Google Play by searching OPEIU.

# Meeting the Challenges of a Changed World

Union leaders and activist members from across the United States recently joined together to examine ways the union can meet the workplace challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As important, they explored the critical role our union plays in the fight for racial and economic equity for all working people.

The pandemic crisis has brought to the forefront the importance of belonging to a union. The public agrees. In a recent poll 65 percent of people said they have a favorable view of unions and the number is even higher among younger people. A labor-friendly administration and resurgence of social justice activism now opens the opportunity to ramp up our union power.

Seizing this opportunity, the 2021 OPEIU Educational Conference, held virtually in October, featured discussions about leveraging that union power at the bargaining table to secure remote work flexibility, fair wages and benefits, win employee grievances and how best to bring the benefits of a union to working people who need it most in so-called “right-to-work” states.

The panel discussion, Busting Union Busting, featured a presentation by Dr. Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labor education research at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Backed by data, her message was clear: anti-union tactics are pervasive — and here to stay. That’s why “union tactics are even more important than employer tactics,” Bronfenbrenner stressed, saying an active and engaged membership can fend off employer actions intended to break the union and take away employees’ rights in the workplace.

Panelists from OPEIU local unions around the country agreed, focusing much of the conversation on how to help members identify and neutralize their employers’ anti-worker tactics, such as plant and worksite closings, the firing of workers for union activity, threatening to cut wages or benefits, surveillance, requiring workers to attend captive-audience meetings during work hours, and other forms of intimidation.

The final day of the conference focused on the union’s role in the fight for racial and economic equity in our local unions and workplaces, ensuring equitable opportunities for all regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation. A recent



Activists from throughout the country participate via Zoom.



OPEIU President Richard Lanigan introduces the new OPEIU Medicare Advantage Plans, now available to all current and future retired members.

**“A strong union means talking about and fighting for gender and racial equity in the workplace and in our communities.”**

poll indicated union members consider their union’s fight for economic and racial justice to be just as important as its role in bargaining for wages and benefits. A strong union means talking about and fighting for gender and racial equity in the workplace and in our communities.

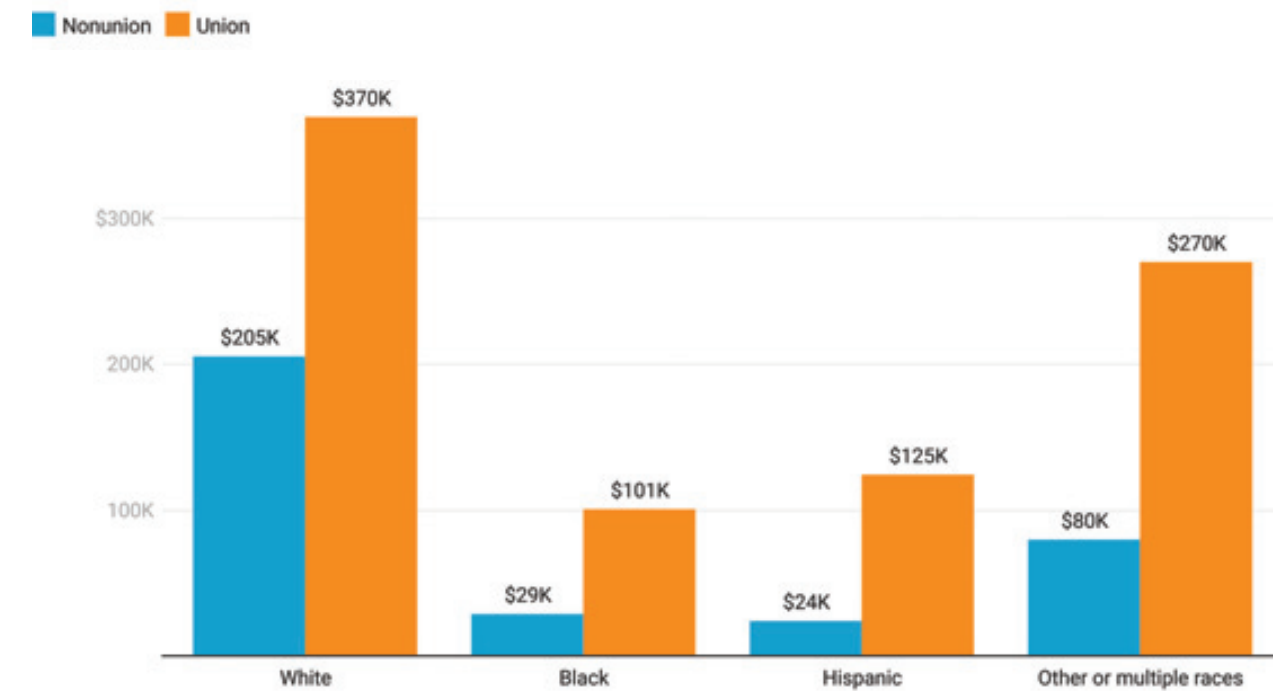
The discussion featured a panel of local union activists sharing their experiences establishing justice committees to tackle these important issues and ensure a more inclusive union.



A panel discusses their experiences establishing racial and economic justice committees in their local unions.

## Union membership narrows the racial wealth gap

Median household wealth by race or ethnicity and union membership, 2010–2019



According to a 2021 study by the Center for American Progress, statistics clearly show having a union in the workplace drastically narrows the racial wage gap. This graphic was created and published by the Center for American Progress (americanprogress.org).

Note: All monetary amounts are in 2019 U.S. dollars, adjusted for inflation using the Urban Consumer Price Index Retroactive Series (CPI-U-RS). “Union” households include a head of household or spouse covered by a union contract. The sample only includes households with a head of household or spouse who is age 25 or older, nonretired, and earning a wage or salary.  
 Chart: Center for American Progress • Source: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, “Survey of Consumer Finances: 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019,” available at <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm> (last accessed August 2021); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “R-CPI-U-RS Homepage,” available at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/research-series/r-cpi-u-rs-home.htm> (last accessed August 2021); John Sabelhaus and Alice Henriquez Volz, “Are Disappearing Employer Pensions Contributing to Rising Wealth Inequality?,” Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, February 1, 2019, available at <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/are-disappearing-employer-pensions-contributing-to-rising-wealth-inequality-20190201.htm>.



# Celebrating Unity and Inclusivity

Local 8 in Seattle's Unity Potluck gave members a chance to socialize safely and have some fun with their union siblings after being separated during the pandemic. Perhaps more importantly, it provided a space to share resources encouraging racial equity and social justice in our workplaces and communities.

Local 8's Race, Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Committee hosted the friendly and inclusive potluck picnic for members and their co-workers, friends, spouses, kids and even pets. The outdoor event followed all COVID-19 protocols and featured music, games, art projects, great food and even better conversations. There was also a BYOB, bring your own book, themed on any social justice issue — such as labor history, racism, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, voting rights, climate justice and incarceration — to swap with friends and union siblings. This sharing of ideas and information to foster inclusivity is at the heart of Local 8's mission.

"The RESJ Committee works to define solidarity and community in our union," said Emmanuel Flores, a shop steward and committee co-chair. "Instead of referring to life as a melting pot, we refer to life as a potluck where we approach race equity and social justice by recognizing all cultures, belief systems and walks of life."



## Health Care Workers Deserve More Than Applause

For nearly two years, OPEIU health care professionals have been on the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic. Enduring long hours and mandatory overtime — often without extra compensation — they've put their physical and mental health on the line to provide the best patient care possible.

They've rightly been called heroes, yet still most of these brave essential workers have not received the compensation for their service they deserve. Instead, they've been short-staffed, overworked and underpaid.

Through many surges leaving hospitals at their breaking points, health care workers have been risking their lives and the lives of their families to provide quality, compassionate care to their patients. Most of them have not received compensation for their service and sacrifice.

In interview after interview with White Collar for this article, OPEIU health care workers shared harrowing stories of working through the pandemic. From a lack of PPE in the initial months, to hospitals becoming overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients and co-workers contracting the virus, often emotional OPEIU nurses and other professionals spoke of the great physical and emotional toll working in crisis conditions for so long has had on them and their co-workers.

And, all cited staffing shortages — a long-standing problem made even worse by the pandemic — as the biggest challenge they and their facilities face.

"The health care providers caring for individuals in long-term care facilities have been overwhelmed with not only the medical ramifications regarding limited PPE, frequent COVID-19 testing, mandatory overtime, concerns about contracting the virus and bringing it home, but also with the emotional toll that happens on a daily basis when caring for those who become more like family than just someone who is living there," said Kay Young, a district director with the Michigan Association of Governmental Employees (MAGE)/OPEIU Local 2002, who represents state employees working in long-term care facilities.

Others told similar stories about the difficulty of balancing their responsibilities to patients and their obligations to themselves, their mental health and their families at a time when intensive care unit admissions for COVID-19, almost exclusively among the unvaccinated, are still at worrisome levels.

Health care workers, in a range of surveys, have reported experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, depression and anxiety at levels mirroring the ebb and flow of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, many nurses surveyed reported being overworked — in no small part due to the aforementioned staffing issues — as a major driver of their stress.

Despite being labeled by those on both sides of the political aisle and across the nation as heroes, nurses have gotten the short end of the stick in state legislatures.

Nurses and their unions have been calling for state lawmakers to implement regulations to protect themselves and their patients, but only one state, New York, has passed significant legislation aimed at meeting nurses' demands during the pandemic.

In June, New York signed into law a safe staffing bill requiring hospitals to form "clinical staffing committees" with nurses involved, and levying financial penalties on hospitals who fail to do so. The state also introduced the Essential Workers Student Grant Act, which provides financial aid grants to students who worked as essential workers during the pandemic.



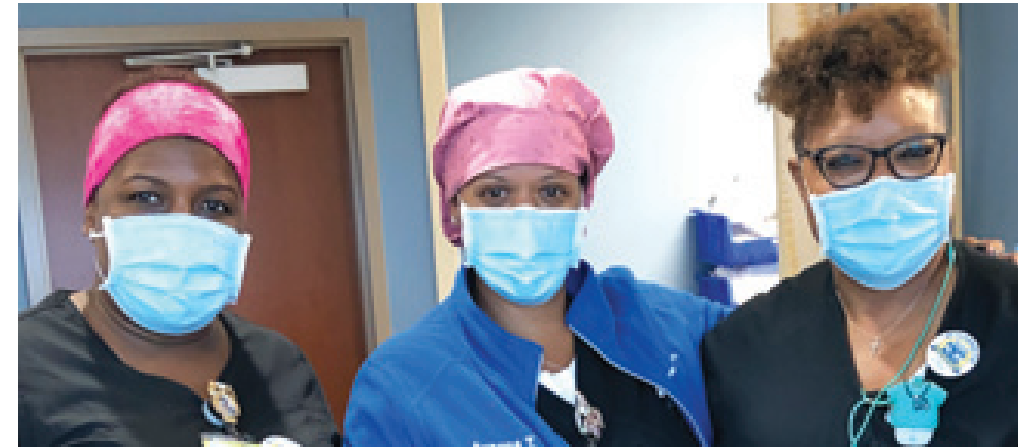
Nurses at the Queen's Medical Center in Honolulu, members of the Hawai'i Nurses' Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50, have held strong during the pandemic.

While many bills are pending on the floor of state legislatures, the prospect for more protections or compensation for nurses seems slim. But there is hope: New York's safe staffing bill, if successful, could prove to be a model for other statehouses. The committee-based approach to safe staffing, rather than a top-down mandate (much like the state's "fast food wage board," which was concocted in part to avoid damaging political fights and in 2015 recommended a higher wage for fast food workers) might be an easier sell to lawmakers in politically polarized states, such as Pennsylvania and Michigan.

Health care workers have also been demanding their employers fairly compensate them for their sacrifice and service.

Professionals at Kaiser Permanente, including many OPEIU members, have been mobilizing and demanding their employer fairly compensate them for service through what has been dubbed a 'hero bonus.' Their efforts have paid off.

"I'm worried about bringing the virus home to my asthmatic son, my mother who's battling cancer or my grandmother," said



Left to right are Clinical Medical Assistants Kim Carolina, Ayanna Thomas and Latravia Hill, members of Local 2 employed at Kaiser Permanente South Baltimore County Medical Center in Maryland. Kaiser members fought for and won a 'hero bonus.'

Johnsolene Caffey, a member of Local 2 and a clinical medical assistant at Kaiser's Virginia Medical Center in Falls Church. "Kaiser is making billions in profits, and they need to reward those of us on the front lines."

"During the pandemic, some Kaiser workers have made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives," added Carlene Gonzalez, a licensed practical nurse at Kaiser's Virginia Medical Center in Tysons Corner and a Local 2 member. "It's time management honors the front-line workforce with the 'hero bonus.'"

Kaiser recently announced it is agreeing to staff's demand for a bonus for all 85,000 members of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions across the country. In another major win, Kaiser also said it will extend employees' COVID-19 paid leave benefits through March 31 and their childcare grants through April 3. The bonus and extended benefits will help retain staff for safe, quality care.

This proves when workers unite and fight through their union, they win!

But so many other health care workers still haven't received compensation for all their service and sacrifice. Undeterred, they're staying united and fighting for their patients and co-workers.

Many of the nurses we spoke with said the pandemic had made their unit closer, as they pulled together as a team to care for their patients and help each other get through the worst of the pandemic.

"It brought us closer together as a team," said Paige Yates, a registered nurse at CHI St. Vincent in Little Rock, who is president

of Local 22 and chair of the OPEIU Nurses Council (ONC), which represents the interests of OPEIU's approximately 25,000 members who work in health care.

"They've had to work more with less resources, taking care of more patients with less nurses and staff on the floor," Yates said. "They've figured out how to do that and still give the quality patient care they want to give. But it's been extremely stressful for the majority of them."



Local 30 Executive Board Member Margie Chavez, left, a Kaiser Permanente employee since 2009 and union partnership representative with the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions, joins other coalition members demonstrating in San Diego for legislation to fairly compensate health care workers who sacrificed so much during the pandemic.



Local 29 members employed at Kaiser Permanente march in solidarity with Kaiser Stationary Engineers Local 39 on strike at Oakland Medical Center. Approximately 700 members of Stationary Engineers Local 39 went on strike in September across Northern California at 24 Kaiser locations due to stalled contract negotiations. The engineers, who keep hospital facilities and medical equipment functioning properly, are fighting for fair wages and benefits.



## Defenders of Wildlife Staff Join Local 2

Employees at Defenders of Wildlife have organized a union with Local 2 in Washington, D.C., to gain a stronger voice in their workplace.

In September, the employees voted overwhelmingly to unionize, with 93 percent voting in favor of joining Local 2. The unit, of about 110 members, is composed of habitat conservation specialists, renewable energy analysts, conservation data scientists, conservation law attorneys, communication specialists, government relations representatives and more.

The group, known as Defenders United, originally sought voluntary recognition from management, which was denied despite having more than 75 percent support, according to Kelly Russo, a Local 2 organizer.

"I am so proud to see the hard work of our union realized today as our colleagues voted to formalize Defenders United to represent the interests of staff," said Shayna Steingard, a renewable energy and wildlife policy analyst and an organizing committee member. "As we move into collective bargaining, I look forward to seeing how the power of staff representation and vision will help transform our workplace."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, offered his congratulations and support of the new unit after the election, tweeting "Congratulations on your solidarity in forming a union at Defenders of Wildlife. We need strong unions to give workers a voice in the workplace."

Defenders of Wildlife works to protect all native animals and plants throughout North America in their natural communities. The unit is headquartered in D.C., but includes members across the country, including Alaska.



Erica Prather, left, a national outreach representative, and Rosie Sanchez, Rockies and Plains program coordinator, proudly wear their Defenders United shirts.

## Anthem Blue Cross Members Vote to Ratify Contract Improvements



The Local 29 Anthem Blue Cross negotiating team, left to right, are International Vice President and Local 29 President and Business Manager Tamara R. Rubyn, member Michelle Medrano, Shop Steward Sheldon Huell, Executive Board member and Chief Steward Holly Carey, Executive Board member and Steward Juanita Johnson, member Wendy Pope, Secretary-Treasurer and Business Representative Kelly Gschwend, Steward Debbie Cady and member Ben Lyon.

The more than 230 members at Anthem Blue Cross represented by Local 29 in Oakland voted to ratify modifications to their collective bargaining agreement. Highlights include a 9 percent wage increase during the contract term, a \$1,000 net bonus and improvements such as a remote work program ensuring employees will be able to continue to work remotely.

After 15 bargaining sessions, the Local 29 negotiating team was able to fend off all the employer's takeaway proposals and secure a contract that includes the addition of virtual bulletin boards with electronic access for all remote workers, additional shop stewards, improved bereavement leave, increased employer contributions to the retiree medical savings account and the addition of Juneteenth as an observed holiday.

## Local 153 Administration Elected



At the Local 153 membership meeting, left to right, are Secretary-Treasurer Myra Hepburn, Executive Board member Grace Adams-Cunningham, President Steve Turkeltaub, Executive Board member Danette Torres, Business Manager Richard Lanigan, Executive Board member and Shop Steward Mark Phillips, members Kelly Cunin and Jeanne Drevon and Shop Steward Pansy Royal.

Local 153 Business Manager Richard Lanigan and the union's administration team were reelected by acclamation at a recent membership meeting. It will be Lanigan's second term as business manager, and he and the rest of the elected administration will serve for three years. Local 153 is located in New York City.

Also elected were Secretary-Treasurer Myra Hepburn, who also serves as an OPEIU vice president, President Steve Turkeltaub, Vice President Wilma Artau-Banda, Recording Secretary Brenda St. John, and trustees Patrick Flanagan and Millie Sanchez. Also elected to the executive board were Nora Avila, Frances Avnet, Grace Adams-Cunningham, Anna Gallo, Susan Hermon, Julio Hernandez, Philip Holmgren, Brenda Knight, Richard C. Knowles, Amanda Kalinowski, Peter McGurgan, Judith Morales, Kathy Neville, Margaret Noonan, Jason Rodgers, Brandee Siegfried, Eugene Taylor, Danette Torres, Jessica Timo, Lorraine Fay, Mark Phillips and Gil Yellinek.

"I want to thank the Local 153 membership for this vote of confidence in the union's leadership team," said Lanigan, who also serves as OPEIU president. "I also express deep gratitude to the members of the union's administration and staff for their dedication and hard work. They do not have easy jobs, as a rule, but they have worked even harder during this unprecedented pandemic. On my and their behalf, I pledge to all members we will continue to do everything possible to earnestly represent you, not only during these difficult times, but at all times."

## Pennsylvania Nurses Join Local 153

Approximately 750 Pennsylvania nurses have joined Local 153, as their former union, OPEIU Healthcare Local 112, has merged with the New York local.

With the retirement of Michael Bodinsky, Local 112's long-serving executive director, the nurses considered options for their future. After careful consideration, they approached Local 153 about a possible merger. "We did our due diligence and determined that Local 153 has the capability to represent the nurses fully and effectively," said Richard

Lanigan, Local 153 business manager and OPEIU president. "At the same time, it was clear an infusion of new membership would be very helpful to Local 153's recovery from the devastating effects of the pandemic."

Local 112 members voted resoundingly in favor of the merger. As part of the agreement, Local 112 proposed the proceeds in its treasury be earmarked for Local 153 organizing efforts. "It now means Local 153 has an organizing fund to ensure the growth of our union for many years into the future," Lanigan said.

## Jearlean Fleming Celebrates 50 Years as OPEIU Member



Jearlean Fleming, president of Local 391 in Chicago, is celebrating 50 years as an OPEIU member and leader. After all this time, however, she's still listening to and learning from her members.

"I continue to keep abreast of the issues facing my members," Fleming said. "Carrie B. Brown, Local 391's former president, once told me 'hold your head up, speak only as loud as you need to, be passionate about what you do, be professional in all you do, and treat others with respect and do the best job you can.'

"Most importantly, she told me to listen."

Joining OPEIU in 1971, Fleming soon became a Local 391 trustee and then president. She is also a member of the local's contract bargaining team, has served as a delegate to several International conventions, participated in educational conferences and has joined the fight for her members at many rallies, protests and pickets.

Fleming also believes deeply in the importance of constant learning and honing of her skills. She recently attended the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute, where she received her certificate in labor studies.

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## Local 8 Conducts Food Drive for Those Hit Hardest by Pandemic

As 2020 came to an end, Local 8 in Seattle recognized the need created by the pandemic for food assistance for many in its communities. Thus, the local's Communications Committee launched a food drive to encourage members to donate to Northwest Harvest, which collects food donations at many locations in Washington state, or to their local food bank.

The committee, which coordinates the local's visibility and involvement in its communities, asked members to share their individual donations on a virtual bulletin board so everyone could see their collective impact. According to Local 8 Organizing Director Corinne Cosentino, members were extremely generous and many found creative ways to make the most of their donations.

"Our members employed at Kaiser Permanente made it a workplace project and collected and donated together," Cosentino reported. "Another member, Kay Michlik from IAM 751, had her husband and his music partner put on a sidewalk concert that raised \$100 for their local food bank in Burien. Local 8 so appreciates everyone's kindness and generosity."



Phoebe Feldsher, a union representative at Local 8, brings donations to a Northwest Harvest location.



Local 8 Union Representative Valarie Peaphon brings three bags of groceries to a local food bank.

## Local 6 Arbitration Victory Means Promotion and Back Pay for Member

Local 6 in Braintree, Massachusetts, won an arbitration victory resulting in a promotion retroactive to 2019 with full back pay and benefits for a high-level supervisor within the facilities management department of the Massachusetts Trial Court.

"The arbitrator's award helped resolve a significant point of ongoing contention regarding the subjectivity of the promotional process and lack of deference given to seniority due to heavy reliance on an antiquated interview scoring system," said Phil Basile, chief field services and legal officer for Local 6.

"We're looking forward to applying the arbitrator's rationale to future promotional grievances," Basile continued. "We'll then be better able to fight for our members who are having difficulty advancing their careers because of an imperfect system."



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## Happy Holidays from OPEIU

OPEIU wishes you and your family  
the happiest of holidays, and  
all the best for a healthy  
and prosperous new year!

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