OPEIU CONNECT
Issue 566, Fall 2026



A HOME IN OUR UNION



Protecting Jobs from AI is the New Union Battleground

By Tyler Turner
President

Artificial intelligence has become inescapable. It is so prominent in our everyday lexicon that the term itself can sometimes feel devoid of meaning. Yet, unlike many developments we have accepted as the new normal, we cannot lose sight of what AI represents and the very real implications it may have for working people.

For workers, one of the most important challenges is cutting through the nebulous language surrounding AI and understanding what these technologies are and what they are not. In many cases, the underlying technology has existed in workplaces for years. Employers have long used software to determine staffing levels, schedule employees, analyze performance, manage inventory and make other workplace decisions.

What has changed is accessibility. Today, an employer does not need to hire a team of programmers to implement increasingly complex systems. In many cases, a manager can simply interact with an AI program through a chat-like function and prompt it to produce an analysis or recommendation. Technology once requiring specialized expertise is now accessible to anyone with a computer or even a phone.

These rapid advancements and ease of access have stirred considerable debate about how many jobs AI will ultimately displace across different industries. Some argue the threat is overstated, while others predict widespread disruption. For workers, however, the debate over precisely how many jobs will disappear can obscure a more immediate concern: employers are buying into the promises being made by technology companies about AI's ability to replace our labor.

Employers have repeatedly shown new technologies will be implemented without adequate testing, sufficient understanding of their limitations or meaningful input from the workers who will be expected to use them. The promise of AI can incentivize employers to reduce staffing before they have established whether the technology can perform the work effectively. When the technology inevitably fails, produces inaccurate results or cannot account for the complexities of real-world situations, the consequences are often shifted to an already overburdened workforce.

AI implementation has already begun in non-tech industries among our members. The OPEIU members of International Rescue Committee Workers Unite (IRCWU) have reported the introduction of a client-facing chatbot that, in some cases, will be the first interaction their refugee and immigrant clients will have while trying to navigate services in the midst of crisis. The chatbot leaves the door open for translation errors and the potential that critical information about these immigration cases will be missed. OPEIU nurses are also feeling the impacts of AI in their hospitals and the myriad privacy concerns for patients that have come with it.

One particularly troubling example illustrates where this can lead. Earlier this year, Meta announced plans to install tracking software on employees' work computers. The software captures information including mouse movements, clicks, keystrokes and screenshots. Workers are already familiar with, and opposed to, workplace surveillance tools used to monitor productivity, evaluate performance or administer discipline. In this instance, however, the stated purpose went beyond the usual workplace monitoring. The information collected would be used as part of Meta's AI training efforts, with employees effectively helping the company develop models capable of performing tasks currently performed by its employees.

Think about that. Workers are ultimately eliminating their own jobs because they are forced to generate the data that will automate their workplaces. This is particularly concerning when considered alongside Meta's announcement it would reduce its U.S. workforce by approximately 10 percent.

That raises important questions: What happens to the data once it has been collected? What safeguards prevent an employer from using information for purposes beyond those originally disclosed to employees? What protections exist to prevent sensitive workplace data from being shared or sold?

Continued on page 4

The Midterms Are Over. What Now?

The 2026 midterm elections are behind us and working people are celebrating as worker-friendly candidates, including several union members, won historic races across the country. The balance of power in Washington has shifted and working people have a lot of reasons to be hopeful.

Still, we are facing some tough challenges. Corporate greed, inflation and war have driven up prices of everything from groceries and healthcare to gas. Billionaires are pushing to deploy artificial intelligence technology and build more data centers with no regard for the threats to workers, the environment or humanity.

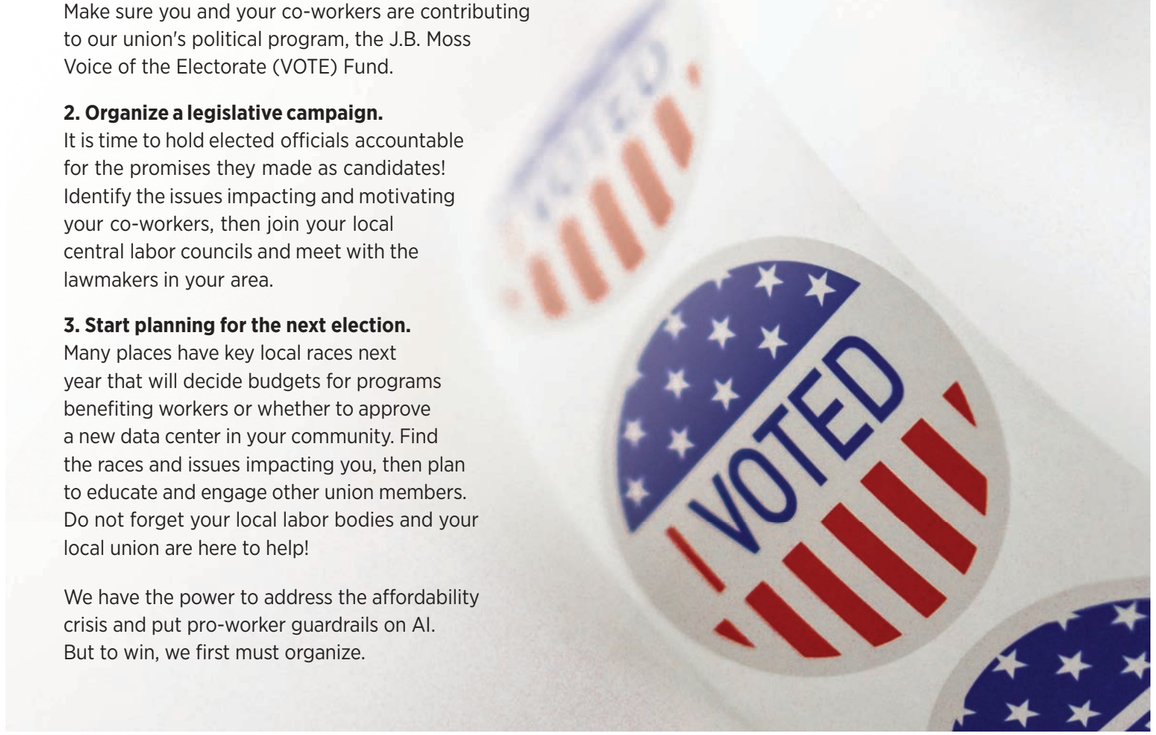
We should take time to celebrate our Election Day wins, then return with renewed focus to securing a better future for working people. Here are three simple ways you and your local union can build on the progress we have made this year:

1. Get involved with your local union's political efforts.
If your local union has a political committee, attend the next meeting. If it does not, investigate starting one. Make sure you and your co-workers are contributing to our union's political program, the J.B. Moss Voice of the Electorate (VOTE) Fund.

2. Organize a legislative campaign.
It is time to hold elected officials accountable for the promises they made as candidates! Identify the issues impacting and motivating your co-workers, then join your local central labor councils and meet with the lawmakers in your area.

3. Start planning for the next election.
Many places have key local races next year that will decide budgets for programs benefiting workers or whether to approve a new data center in your community. Find the races and issues impacting you, then plan to educate and engage other union members. Do not forget your local labor bodies and your local union are here to help!

We have the power to address the affordability crisis and put pro-worker guardrails on AI. But to win, we first must organize.



Continued from page 2

Protecting Jobs from AI is the New Union Battleground

This is not the first time we have been confronted by new technology with the potential to fundamentally alter or eliminate jobs. Technological advancements have transformed workplaces throughout the history of the labor movement. The lessons remain the same. The most effective way to protect workers' rights is the one at the core of what unions do every day — using our collective power to fight for the future we deserve and establish enforceable standards through our collective bargaining agreements.

Those who stand to benefit the most from AI want us to believe it is an unstoppable force, and we might as well accept its integration into every part of our personal and professional lives. This is only true if we let it happen. The labor movement is in a unique position to protect the future of our work and lives from the most extreme visions of AI — those where emerging technology is used to disenfranchise workers instead of bettering our collective lives.

The fight before us is twofold. One, using our collective power to limit the scope of AI overall in our common effort to protect the dignity of our work, the safety of ourselves and our families and the future of our planet. And two, implementing strong collective bargaining standards addressing implementation in the workplace. That means establishing limits on workplace surveillance and data collection. It means protecting workers from discipline or termination based solely on automated systems. It means ensuring workers receive training to use new technologies rather than being displaced by them. And it means making sure the benefits of increased productivity accrue to workers, not just corporations and their shareholders.

Most importantly, we should ask whether we really want consequential workplace decisions to be made by systems that identify patterns without understanding the human circumstances behind them. A chatbot or algorithm may be capable of processing enormous amounts of information, but it does not understand the nuances of human interaction, the circumstances of an individual employee or the biases that may be embedded in the data from which it learns.

The future of our work and lives should not be dictated by tech billionaires. It should be shaped by what working people collectively decide is fair, equitable and worthy of the dignity of work. That is the role of our union, and it is a fight we should be prepared to take on.

Read President Turner's op-ed, "Labor Unions Must Unite Against AI Data Centers" on the next page.

INSIDE



On our cover: Local 6 (Region II) member Marcela Castillo witnessed firsthand the depth of union power when democracy collapsed in her home country, and she became a political refugee in the United States. Read about her experience in our cover story, "Local 6 Member Flees Nicaragua, Graduates from Harvard and Finds a Home in Her Union," on pg. 12.

OPEIU CONNECT

Official Organ of
THE OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION
affiliated with the AFL-CIO, CLC
opeiu.org

TYLER TURNER, *President* — MARY MAHONEY, *Secretary-Treasurer*

ILCA — International Labor Communications Association — 3 — CALM ACPS

OPEIU CONNECT (ISSN 2771-6597) is published quarterly by the Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 Eighth Avenue, Suite 201, New York, NY 10011. Periodical postage paid at New York and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Office and Professional Employees International Union, P.O. Box 1761, New York, NY 10113.

Reproduction by the labor press of any or all material herein contained is not only permitted but wholly desirable in the interest of workers' education.

How a Coalition Between Civil Rights and Labor Created the US's Most Iconic March 6

OPEIU Connect Expands Web Presence with Substack 8

Steward Spotlight: Being an Effective Steward Means Listening with Empathy 9

Refugee Service Workers Turn Political Sorrow into Strong First Contract 15

Labor Unions Must Unite Against AI Data Centers

This op-ed by President Tyler Turner first appeared in The Guardian, Sept. 14, 2026. Reprinted with permission.

For the surging number of Americans who now live alongside constantly humming computer-filled mega-warehouses, it is clear AI data centers come with significant drawbacks.

Opposition to data centers grows on both sides of the political aisle as developers plan to invest $8 trillion to build them in the coming years. The bet is massive — roughly a quarter of our country's entire gross domestic product — but AI CEOs think it will pay off because they believe this technology will allow businesses across industries to rake in profits by cutting out their largest expense: labor. If all goes according to their plan, AI data centers will enable corporations to redistribute workers' salaries to themselves.

This is why I have been so concerned to see the North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU) sign agreements with corporations such as BlackRock, Meta and OpenAI to collaborate on this massive data center expansion. While I applaud the NABTU's success at securing well-paying temporary jobs for their members, these deals ignore the fact that all workers, including construction workers, are part of a class whose replacement is the explicit purpose of AI, and that data centers themselves produce a minuscule number of long-term jobs. With these deals, union members will build the factories of computerized labor that put millions of other workers out of jobs — potentially even themselves.

Until strong regulations are enacted that ensure our livelihoods, community and planet are permanently protected, unions should focus on passing the Artificial Intelligence Data Center Moratorium Act, introduced in Congress by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and support statewide moratoriums like the one recently signed by the New York governor, Kathy Hochul. Once we have achieved a moratorium, the labor movement must unite around a set of demands to ensure workers across industries receive our fair share of AI's potential benefits.

Trump-funding, anti-union tech billionaires tell us they are leading an AI revolution that will fundamentally transform our global economy. I say we take them at their word, get organized and seize the change for the common good. Not only would a moratorium give us the opportunity to negotiate a worker-centered framework for technological development but also put pressure on lawmakers to urgently conduct reviews of data centers' impacts and get regulations on the books. The AI revolution means nothing but loss for the average person if its benefits are concentrated among the already-wealthy. In a survey of OPEIU's membership last year, we found members are already being adversely impacted by AI in myriad ways ranging from layoffs to surveillance to being punished for errors created by AI models.

New York's decision to halt permit issuing for up to a year while the state creates a regulatory framework is a practical, although insufficient, first step. This step came after a data center in Rockland County received $77 million in tax breaks and created only one permanent job — the largest taxpayer subsidy relative to jobs created in United States history. In Virginia, which currently hosts more data centers than any other state, a study found that data centers produce less than one percent of the permanent jobs — largely for technicians and security guards — per dollar invested, compared with other industries.

Beyond the meager ratio of job creation to investment, we should not allow corporations to balloon our energy consumption while wildfires, superstorms and extreme heat ravage our country. In my home state of Texas, just 335 AI data centers already consume enough electricity to drive up rates for the rest of us. At least 248 more are planned, creating a gas-fired power plant boom. Of these, the largest is expected to consume as much electricity as 2.75 million homes — more than Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin combined.

With this, I ask readers to consider if they truly want the future AI companies are crafting for us under the guise of inevitability. If you don't already have one, would you want a data center in your backyard? Do you want to live in a world where jobs involving human ingenuity, sensitivity and creativity are replaced by algorithms?

Should we not dream of something more for ourselves? Of safe and sustainable union jobs that build infrastructure serving the many, not the few? If unions worked together rather than pitting our members against each other, we would not be begging billionaires for temporary jobs that will poison us and our children.

I know a future is possible in which the thousands of office, manufacturing and healthcare workers I represent in cities like Amarillo, Texas; Lansing, Michigan; and Ashburn, Virginia, have their economic and social needs met. But we are not on that path right now. Whether it is through higher wages, shorter workweeks or eliminating dangerous tasks, workers must get their fair share of whatever benefits AI produces, and lawmakers must ensure the data centers powering it are built sustainably, with community consent and a well-paid workforce. At the end of the day, our data fuels their algorithms, our taxes fund their development and our communities host their hardware. The least we should demand is our fair share.

This article contains antiquated language about race, quoted from historical sources.

How a Coalition Between Civil Rights and Labor Created the US's Most Iconic March

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. waited under the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial to deliver his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, labor leaders and civil rights organizers took the stage to advocate for the civil and economic rights of Black Americans. Looking out over the 250,000-person crowd assembled on the National Mall for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, King spoke to a coalition between labor and the civil rights movement that had been decades in the making.



Marchers on the National Mall during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
Photo by James H. Wallace Jr. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

No one was more responsible for this tremendous show of force that successfully pressured the federal government to outlaw formal segregation than Bayard Rustin, the primary organizer, and A. Philip Randolph, trade unionist and civil rights activist.

"The March on Washington is not the climax of our struggle, but a new beginning — not only for the Negro, but for all Americans who thirst for freedom and a better life," Randolph said, as he opened the rally emphasizing the fundamental alignment between the interests of Black people and all workers. "Look for the enemies of Medicare, of higher minimum wages, of Social Security, of federal aid to education, and there you will find the enemy of the Negro." Decades earlier, Randolph organized Black railway workers into the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black-led union in the country. "It falls to us to demand new forms of social planning, to create full employment and to put automation at the service of human needs, not at the service of profits," Randolph added that day in 1963.

The historic march chose jobs and freedom as its top demands because of the conviction that dignified employment with a sufficient wage was required for Black Americans to ever enjoy true freedom. Not only did the march call for the end of horrific Jim Crow segregation laws, but also for the establishment of a federal jobs guarantee, an increase to the minimum wage and an end to discriminatory hiring practices.

The show of force was the result of planning begun in 1959 when Black unionists were fed up with the AFL-CIO's willingness to tolerate segregation in its locals and founded the Negro American Labor Council (NALC) as a new home for Black workers in the labor movement. As NALC's leader, Randolph recognized a mass march was necessary to push forward the ambitious policy agenda he and other Black leaders were fighting for. He sought help from Rustin, who drafted a plan for 100,000 people to shut down Congress and hold a march the following day.

After NALC vice presidents approved the plan, Randolph met with King, who was also considering a mass demonstration in Washington to pressure President John F. Kennedy to enforce school desegregation and end police violence against activists in Alabama. With King on board, the trio reached out to organizers across the country, who mobilized workers of all races with a promise of a new economy that worked for all. Prominent among these organizers were Cleveland Robinson, the Jamaican-born secretary-treasurer of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) District 65, and Walter Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW).

> ***"It falls to us to demand new forms of social planning, to create full employment and to put automation at the service of human needs, not at the service of profits."***
> ***– A. Philip Randolph***

"It is the responsibility of every American to share the impatience of the Negro Americans, and we need to join together, to march together and to work together until we bridge the moral gap between American democracy's noble promises and its ugly practices in the field of civil rights," said Reuther, who was white, at the march. "This rally is not the end. It's the beginning of a great moral crusade to arouse America to the unfinished work of American democracy."

Despite the prominent role of some unions in the civil rights movement, many unions took years to get on board and were slow to integrate Black workers. Seizing on this fissure under the guise of promoting equality, President Richard M. Nixon later required companies on federal contracts to hire a certain quota of Black workers, aware many unions would not be able to meet them, thus requiring the companies to hire nonunion labor. This, in conjunction with reducing pay standards, allowed companies to continue exploiting Black workers as a cheap labor force while simultaneously undermining unions' power.

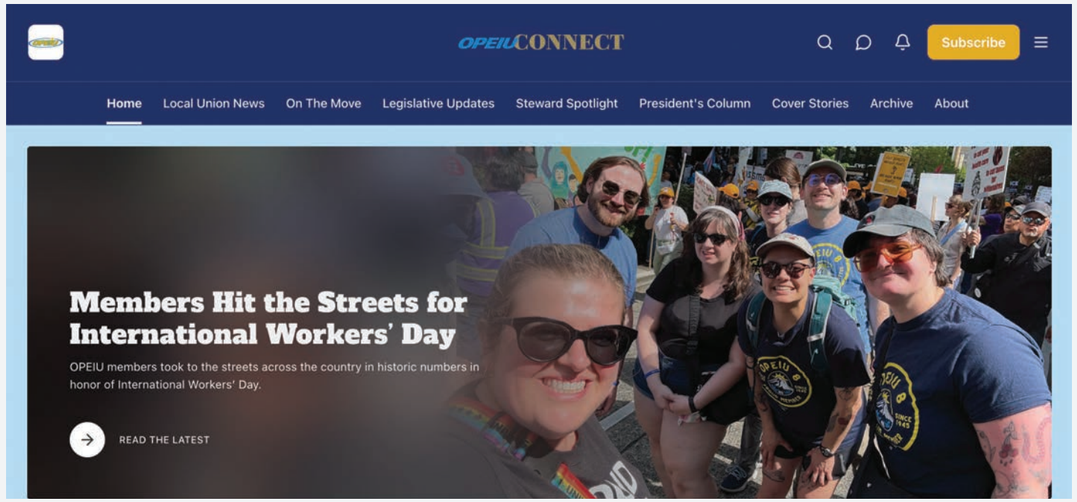
For civil rights leaders like Randolph, Rustin and King, the solution was not to abandon unions but to strengthen Black leadership within them. By the 1970s, Black people were joining unions at rates outpacing any other demographic.

Later reflecting on this complicated history, Rustin understood the success of the March on Washington to be an indication of the transformative potential of labor unions if structured to benefit all workers. As he saw it, it was the primary goal of both Black and non-Black workers to economically empower all working people, and no one had more success in this than unions.

"The prominent racial and ethnic loyalties that divide American society have, together with our democratic creed, obscured a fundamental reality — that we are a class society and, though we do not often talk about such things, that we are engaged in a class struggle," Rustin wrote in 1971. "Blacks are mostly a working people; they continue to need what labor needs; and they must fight side by side with unions to achieve these things."

For Rustin, the sheer scale of the March on Washington and its role in advancing civil rights for Black Americans were testaments to what working people can accomplish when united around a shared call for basic human dignity.

OPEIU Connect Expands Web Presence with Substack



For decades OPEIU members have checked their mailboxes four times a year for the latest OPEIU Connect to read about our union's victories, engage with legislative analyses and learn more about the benefits of union membership. Joining that discussion just got even easier, as OPEIU Connect is now available on its own Substack-based website.

With the creation of OPEIU's Substack, readers can easily browse the stories of our union in one place, categorized by local union and topic, allowing readers to easily sort out stories about local union campaigns or pull up a list of stories about contracts OPEIU nurses have ratified.

Since each article is now hosted on its own webpage, readers can share them with friends, family, local media, co-workers and elected officials. Due to this format, stories will also appear in Google searches, meaning when people search your local union, they will be more likely to see stories about our victories told how we know they should be.

"Bringing OPEIU Connect to Substack is just the natural progression of our core work that starts on the shop floor — empowering members with a voice," said Tyler Turner, president of OPEIU. "OPEIU members will now be able to tell their own stories without the filter of outside editorialization and do so with details that rarely make it out of the union hall."

In a moment when newsrooms across the country are underfunded, consolidating and closing, and studies repeatedly show the American media has deprioritized covering labor, we have a unique opportunity to tell our stories on our own terms. The OPEIU Connect Substack will help fill the coverage gap by bringing our stories to a platform members and the public will be able to easily access.

Visit opeiu.substack.com or scan the QR code to see the site and subscribe to receive email notifications when we publish new articles every quarter. Members will continue to receive a physical copy of OPEIU Connect in their mailboxes and can also find digital copies at opeiu.org.

Being an Effective Steward Means Listening with Empathy



By Gayle Noon
Administrator/Bookkeeper
Colorado Building and Construction Trades Council
Local 30 (Region V)

One of the most rewarding things about being a steward is helping people when they need it most. In my more than 13 years of stewardship, I have had the unique privilege of representing union members across 27 workplaces throughout Colorado.

Many of the offices I represent as steward are small, with some having just two or three members. Many of the employers are labor unions themselves, so management has an implicit understanding of the ins and outs of their staff's union contract. In these cases, it is so important that union staffers — mostly administrative employees — do not have to face their employer alone. Even when I am unsure how to approach a particular issue, I know I can rely on my local union's leadership and staff to help me think through the best way to represent our members.

A large part of being a steward is listening. As any steward knows, not every complaint warrants a grievance, but every complaint deserves to be heard. Even if the complaint does not lead to a grievance, it can help shape priorities when it comes time to renegotiate a contract.

An effective steward understands both sides of a conflict — employer and employee. An essential aspect of being a steward is knowing each side's motivations and goals, which helps me think through the best way to solve a problem, whether through a grievance or through the collective bargaining process.

As a steward, it is also critical to build the foundation so the next steward can hit the ground running. I am constantly taking mental notes of members who really know their contract, are kind but firm and respected by their colleagues. Those soft skills are some of the most important skills a new steward can have, and those who have those soft skills are usually excellent candidates to be a steward.

> ***"Above all, being empathetic and being able to put yourself in the shoes of your members is the most valuable skill a steward can have."***

Above all, being empathetic and being able to put yourself in the shoes of your members is the most valuable skill a steward can have. It is a privilege to be able to represent my union siblings during their toughest moments and their best moments, and to give back to the labor movement that has given me so much.

Congrats to OPEIU Scholarship Winners

Congratulations to recipients of the 2026 OPEIU Scholarships. OPEIU awards numerous scholarships annually to further the education of members and their families. Everyone is encouraged to apply. Applications for the 2027 scholarships will be available in January at opeiu.org.

Howard Coughlin Memorial Scholarship: Full-Time Winners



Mariana Vargas
Local 2007A
Region I



Olivia Singh
Local 153
Region II



Gillianne McLaughlin
Local 100
Region III



Jonathan Gonzalez
Local 277
Region IV



Emani Jernigan
Local 29
Region V



Madelyn Clemenson
Local 8
Region VI



Jaxson Sherrod
Local 2002
Region VII



Bryce Toledo-Lue
Local 50
Region VIII

Visit opeiu.org for more information about OPEIU scholarships and other membership benefits.

Howard Coughlin Memorial Scholarship: Part-Time Winners



Lilian Lima
Local 6
Region II



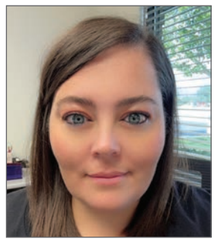
Zechariah Hines
Local 4873
Region III



Juan Chavez
Local 251
Region IV



Elisama Loera Gonzalez
Local 30
Region V



Alexandria Cutler
Local 11
Region VI



Adam Krause
Local 459
Region VII



Jasmine Lianalyn Rocha
Local 50
Region VIII

Student Debt Reduction Recipients Announced

OPEIU provides five awards annually of $2,500 each to help members reduce student debt through the OPEIU Michael Goodwin Student Debt Reduction Program.

The 2026 recipients are: **Nichole Hayes**, Local 6 (Region II); **Grace Cheam**, Local 8 (Region VI); **Sara Prevost**, Local 40 (Region VII); **Ashley McMillan**, Local 494 (Region VII); and **Kristine Chan**, Local 50 (Region VIII).

OPEIU members with at least $10,000 in student debt can apply. For more information about this and all your other OPEIU membership benefits, visit **opeiu.org**.

Local 6 Member Flees Nicaragua, Graduates from Harvard and Finds a Home in Her Union



Marcela Castillo on her graduation day from Harvard University.

When democracy collapses and you become a political refugee in a different country undergoing its own democratic decay, the true depth of union power reveals itself in a way many of us never witness firsthand.

That is what happened to Marcela Castillo, who joined Local 6 (Region II) in Massachusetts in 2024 after fleeing Nicaragua, navigating the immigration process under President Donald Trump and graduating from Harvard University. Through those experiences, Castillo says she has learned that civil groups, such as unions, are fundamental to maintaining worker power during the worst political conditions.

"We escaped the dictatorship because we were being persecuted, targeted and threatened, and we come here, and we're being told that we're criminals when we're just trying to survive," said Castillo, who is a court interpreter scheduler in the office of language access at the Massachusetts Trial Court. "I've been able to get my dignity back and respect through the union … and it has only been through the union that I was able to actually have the people who were not treating me right respect me."

Castillo's journey to Local 6 membership began while she was a law student in Nicaragua, which coincided with President Daniel Ortega, originally the leader of Nicaragua's Sandinista Revolution, entering the second decade of his second presidency.

Castillo's family was deeply involved in the revolution, which overthrew Nicaragua's right-wing dictator in 1979 and redistributed land to peasants, promoted mass unionization and drastically increased literacy, all while holding off several United States-backed attempts to overthrow the Sandinista government.

Her family was initially optimistic when Ortega returned to power in 2007. But in 2018, after a decade when courts lost autonomy and term limits were eliminated, the government cut pension benefits, a final blow to those committed to the pro-worker roots of the Sandinista movement.

Castillo and her law school classmates joined retirees to protest, but chants quickly became screams as Ortega loyalists arrived to viciously beat the activists. As demonstrations continued, state violence escalated and hundreds of protesters were killed, including some of her classmates. Castillo began fearing for her life when she started receiving death threats.

"It was very traumatic because I remember the police going after my family, and I just didn't understand why a movement that was initially supposed to be for the people [would do that]," she said.

One night, she fled over the border and boarded a plane to Miami. After living with family for a few years, she was accepted to Harvard University, where her studies focused on the crisis in her homeland.

Her 2025 graduation reflected years of perseverance through acute persecution, but it did not mark the end of her hardships.

Castillo says Trump's resurgence has had a chilling impact on immigrant communities, which she is reminded of daily as United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents drag people out of Massachusetts courts.

Castillo also faced mistreatment in the workplace over the last year. But with this issue, there was an immediate solution that came from a different layer of support: the solidarity within OPEIU.

"We do not work to serve other people or institutions. We work to have a dignified life. And unions are the organizations that have historically been able to grant us that. Because at the end of the day, our rights are not given to us if it's not through pushing back and through a fight," she said.

Castillo says she is witnessing changes in the U.S. today that are deeply reminiscent of the erosion of democracy she witnessed in Nicaragua, most notably the administration's attacks on unions, universities and the media.

> ***"I've been able to get my dignity back and respect through the union …"***

But Castillo learned some lessons through these experiences to help us avoid the worst possible outcomes. Among those, she says we must stay informed, assert our rights when they are under attack and strengthen our bonds with co-workers, colleagues and neighbors. We must also never let any single leader define our movement.

As Castillo learned through joining Local 6, our union not only gives us a voice, but enables us to achieve a more just world for all.

"If you're a U.S. citizen, I think it should be a duty for you to go and claim back your country, because the only way that an authoritarian country will not consolidate into a dictatorship is through civil society," Castillo said.

"I am really hopeful this will not happen because I've seen people in the streets in Boston … millions around cities in the U.S., and if there's one thing that will take the power from dictators, it's people standing up to them," she said.

Nurses Caring for up to 21 Psychiatric Patients at a Time Organize with Local 459

Forty-nine nurses at Bronson Behavioral Health Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, became the latest healthcare workers to join OPEIU after voting to unionize with Local 459 (Region VII).

The 96-bed psychiatric hospital first opened in 2023 to address significant service gaps in the area, but workers quickly realized providing the best care possible to the community was not necessarily the healthcare network's top priority. As executives raked in seven-figure salaries, nurses sometimes cared for up to 21 patients at a time, more than three times the staff-to-patient ratio allowed in states such as California.

With these ratios, patients with severe psychiatric disorders could not receive the attention they needed. Furthermore, the short staffing required nurses to step into roles outside of their jobs, leading to multiple assaults on nurses and adding unquantifiable trauma on top of their already overwhelming workloads.

"It felt like we were, as a staff, very alone. Leadership was not present and, when they were [present] they were, unfortunately, dictating how to run things but not providing a lot of support physically, mentally or emotionally," said Nicholas Cooper, who has been a registered nurse at Bronson since 2024.

Nurses quickly began organizing and, in March, were connected to Local 459, which represents about 500 other nurses in Michigan.

"When we began to talk about the union, it was like we had already talked about it without words because we were so trauma bonded," he added. "Our vision was to really take back some of the power we had forgotten we had."

Workers filed for an election with the National Labor Relations Board soon after and requested voluntary recognition. When Bronson's CEO quickly dismissed the request, the workers were energized to continue organizing and win their election.

On June 10, they were successful when approximately 70 percent of voters opted to come together and join OPEIU. Out of the 49 workers who will be covered, two are LPNs and the rest are RNs.



Some of the leaders of the organizing effort at Bronson Behavioral Health Hospital are, left to right, Tammy Dykstra, Nicholas Cooper and Jenna Hawley, all registered nurses.

Unfortunately, the hospital is challenging the election results rather than accepting the clear will of the workers as federal law requires. But delays will provide more time to organize the workers behind strong demands for improved working conditions they can bring to bargaining.

In addition to safe staffing ratios, the new OPEIU members are fighting for more paid time off, higher salaries and protections against being required to do work off the clock.

Cooper said nurses are already seeing the benefits of being organized. "It seems like [management] realized they're no longer managing numbers, but they actually have to work with people now, and I feel like it actually scares them," he said.

Nurses at Bronson have joined thousands of other OPEIU nurses across Michigan who led strong and organized campaigns in recent years resulting in historic contracts.

Refugee Service Workers Turn Political Sorrow into Strong First Contract

Despite a year of devastating funding cuts and brazen state violence against Texas' immigrant communities, 40 refugee support workers represented by Local 277 (Region IV) ratified a first contract with Mosaic Family Services in Dallas with major gains expanding worker power within the nonprofit.

Mosaic workers — who are largely immigrants and speak 31 languages between them — accompany children to court, operate domestic violence shelters, provide legal services, deliver mental health counseling and connect refugees to services. The contract, ratified without opposition, lays out strict guidelines for responding to potential immigration raids in the workplace, includes union members in the hiring of new unit members and improves layoff protocols.

"This contract is incredible for Mosaic workers, who are mostly refugees, immigrants, racialized folks and survivors," said Andrea Valladares, a bargaining committee member and case manager at Mosaic. "This contract means more job security in this political landscape, crucial protections for immigrant workers and the ability to speak up about the migrant experience, allowing us to advocate for people getting forcibly displaced right now."

The movement leading to this contract began in April 2024, when workers' anger was mounting over the organization's refusal to condemn Israel's onslaught of Gaza that, at that point, had killed 35,000 people. Workers delivered a petition to management demanding they take a stance, but the demand was refused and the workers were reprimanded instead. The experience showed management was out of touch with worker and client sentiments and would remain so unless pressured to listen.

During the following year, the signatories grew into an organizing committee that would come to include more than half of union-eligible workers. Then, in February 2025, they streamed out of their cubicles dressed in red to deliver a new letter, this time announcing the formation of their union with majority support and requesting voluntary recognition of their union, which they received a week later.

When federal funding for Texas refugee services was frozen soon after, the newly recognized union jumped into action, successfully urging local congressmembers to sign a demand letter. The funding was eventually restored. The momentum from this series of victories, compounded by the urgency of responding to escalating immigration raids, carried the workers into bargaining with audacity and solidarity.

The nonprofit has experienced significant funding cuts over the last year due to broader federal funding cuts to nonprofits and immigrant rights organizations, so wage negotiations were postponed until next year. For now, the two-year contract also creates a more robust training program, establishes a system for resolving workload issues and requires the organization to resolve unsafe shelter conditions within 72 hours.

The Mosaic workers' victory encapsulates how union contracts can be a tool to promote justice for workers and the community even when workers share a mission with the organization and financial resources have already been stretched thin.



Local 277 members employed at Mosaic Family Services in Dallas.

Connecticut Credit Union Workers Ratify Contract with Big Wage Bumps

Members of Local 106 (Region II) in Groton, Connecticut, employed at Charter Oak Federal Credit Union voted nearly unanimously to ratify a contract increasing wages by an average of 21.5 percent over its four-year duration.



The Charter Oak Federal Credit Union bargaining committee are, left to right, Local 106 Treasurer Nichole Andersen, President Paul Bruno Jr., Trustee Patricia Mehlenbacher, Trustee and Steward Shannon Gendreau, Steward Erin Leite, Vice President Nate Newhouse and Stewards Donaven Jack and Jesse Colella.

Organized with OPEIU since 1963, the 103 workers at one of Connecticut's largest credit unions successfully negotiated a contract rewarding longevity, protecting health benefits and providing adequate time off.

With this new contract, the members will be better positioned to continue their work operating 12 branches of a banking system designed to benefit clients rather than outside stakeholders.

Hawai'i Nurses March on the Boss, Deliver Petition Demanding Equality



Nurses at The Queen's Medical Center-Wahiawā in O'ahu delivered a petition alongside community supporters and elected officials this summer demanding equality with the hospital chain's nurses at other locations. Queen's Health Systems acquired Wahiawā General Hospital, later renamed The Queen's Medical Center-Wahiawā, in 2024.

Nurses at the hospital, members of the Hawai'i Nurses' Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50 (Region VIII), are demanding the same workplace conditions nurses at other locations have won through their union, including safe staffing ratios, recruitment and retention initiatives and respect on the job.

More Than 400 Workers at NYC's Largest Prison Re-Entry Nonprofit Unionize with Local 153

The employees are underpaid, often working emotionally draining and dangerous shifts at The Fortune Society, New York City's largest nonprofit dedicated to helping people achieve a dignified life after incarceration. A day can take workers between Rikers Island Correctional Facilities, homeless shelters and courthouses to meet with clients, fill out applications and testify at hearings.

After a year of one-on-ones where workers dared each other to believe they deserve more than a precarious job, more than 400 workers have officially unionized with Local 153 (Region II). The organizing victory is a tremendous shock to New York City's publicly funded human services nonprofits, where workers are unaccustomed to having strong job protections.

"It is the workers that make Fortune the place it is, and the workers who are standing up, using their voices and demanding a seat at the table in navigating important issues that affect all of us," said Caleb Knight, a creative arts senior associate at the nonprofit. "[Our union], Fortune Workers United, believes Fortune's mission is more than a slogan. It is a call to action, and that action must begin with us, by building an agency that genuinely cares about and supports every member of its community."

Many of the workers at Fortune were previously incarcerated and former clients, making their connection to the organization personal. They are also more vulnerable if they lose their job, as unemployment rates for formerly incarcerated individuals are close to 10 times higher than the rest of the population. As a result, many workers had been hesitant to speak up about stagnant salaries, inadequate safety protections and low career mobility.

Last year, workers relaunched a union drive that failed more than a decade ago to begin addressing these concerns. They connected with Local 153, who helped them plot a strategy to utilize a never-before-used local law requiring human services nonprofits receiving city funding to enter into labor peace agreements with workers who express an intent to organize. The effort was publicly announced this year on May Day alongside a parallel drive at the Osborne Association, a related nonprofit that recently organized with Local 153.



Members of Fortune Workers United march in New York City's May Day parade to announce their union with Local 153.

An organization receiving nearly $370 million from New York City taxpayers through 22 active contracts, Fortune's management agreed to not interfere in workers' organizing and to recognize the union once a majority of workers signed union cards. Worker organizers spread the word of the union through barbecues, cold calls and hallway conversations over the coming months, eventually securing the necessary signatures to earn voluntary recognition.

"Today we celebrate this victory. Tomorrow, the real work begins, working together to move The Fortune Society forward, strengthen our workforce and ultimately better serve our participants, our communities and our mission," said Malik Hardy, a group facilitator and discharge planner at Fortune. "We want to help build an organization where the people doing this work are heard, supported, protected and equipped to provide the highest level of service to the people who depend on us."

Members are now sorting through their top issues to prepare a list of bargaining demands. Among other things, workers want to eradicate a merit-based raise system leaving many workers without raises and the top-rated workers barely keeping pace with inflation. Workers are also seeking to bargain a caseload cap, stronger safety protocols, a bereavement and emergency leave policy and new hiring protocols.

With these demands, the new OPEIU members say they will be helping Fortune achieve its mission of securing justice, dignity and equality for some of New York City's most marginalized workers.

HOLIDAY SAVINGS
FOR UNION FAMILIES

40 YEARS UNIONPLUS



Making saving easy for you!

Whether you're making room in your gift budget by cutting back on expenses or just looking for good deals, Union Plus is there.

OPEIU

Learn more at unionplus.org

Local 40 VP Recognized for Leadership in Henry Ford Hospital Strike

As a registered nurse at Henry Ford Rochester Hospital in Michigan and vice president of Local 40 (Region VII), Danielle Drouillard spent the last three years leading unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes, bargaining with healthcare executives and winning historic wage increases for hundreds of nurses and radiology technologists. This spring, her leadership received a well-deserved recognition when the Oakland County Democratic Party awarded her their Exemplary Woman in the Labor Force Award.

The award is bestowed to one woman per year at their annual "Power, Pearls and Champagne: Women in Leadership Brunch," where local leaders and elected officials gather to honor audacious women who make the suburban county north of Detroit a more just place. Drouillard, who is also an executive committee member of the party, received the award due to her role in helping Local 40 nurses achieve a safe staffing committee and the first-ever health and safety contract language at Henry Ford, as well as her broader involvement in local Democratic politics.

"I am so grateful to be honored with this award," said Drouillard. "If we, as labor unions, are truly representing and advocating for all our members, the leadership of the union must reflect our membership. My experience as a woman in the workforce allows me to shape the contract language to best protect and empower other women."

Nowhere is the role of female leaders in fighting for economic justice clearer than in the Local 40 nurses' union at Henry Ford, which is almost entirely women led. Through their union and under the leadership of Drouillard, these nurses serve as an example of what transformational change truly means, and how regular people can come together to achieve it.



Danielle Drouillard, RN, right, with Local 40 President and International Vice President representing Region VII Dina Carlisle, RN, left, and State Sen. Sylvia Santana (D-Mich.), who presented the award.

OPEIU CONNECT
AFL-CIO, CLC **Printed in the USA**

OPEIU CONNECT

OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION, AFL-CIO, CLC



Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Bluesky, LinkedIn and X: @opeiu