

CWA Local 1031 Quarterly Update

My name is Kathleen Hernandez. As the new President of CWA Local 1031, I wanted to introduce myself and share with our membership the work we do for you. You are represented by your CWA Branch Presidents and Stewards, the Staff at Local 1031, the National Union in NJ and District 1. Local 1031 will send out a quarterly update to communicate what is happening within Local 1031. This newsletter is filled with a lot of information as it is the first one. Thank you for your support and membership in CWA.

CWA Local 1031 President John E. Rose Retires

CWA Local 1031 President John E. Rose retires after 23 years as President of the Local. John was active in the Operating Engineers before helping CWA Local 1031 organize the supervisors at the former UMDNJ (now UHNJ, Rutgers, and Rowan SOM). John led 1031 through many contracts with the State of NJ, with the last one being the best in over 20 years. He has represented many employees and negotiated some of our library and municipal contracts. He fought hard for our membership and is known for being “Old School.” John’s no-nonsense style has helped to grow CWA Local 1031. We thank him for his years of service, and wish him a happy and healthy retirement. I was the former EVP and ran for the position of President of Local 1031 position unopposed.

Who CWA Local 1031 Represents

CWA Local 1031 represents State Workers at all the State Colleges: Ramapo College, William Paterson University (WPU), Montclair University (MSU), New Jersey City University (NJCU), Kean University, The College of NJ (TCNJ), Thomas Edison State University (TESU), Rowan University, Stockton University, the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Ed (OSHE). We also represent Public (not State) supervisors at Rowan SOM, Rutgers RBHS and at the University Hospital of NJ (UHNJ). We represent workers at the following public libraries in NJ: Bergenfield, Bloomfield, Chatham, Clifton, Cranford, East Brunswick, Edgewater, Elizabeth, Glen Rock, Highland Park, Hoboken, Irvington, Livingston, Maplewood, Middlesex, Milburn, Mount Olive, North Brunswick, Nutley, Orange, Rutherford, South Brunswick, West Milford, West Orange and Westfield. We also represent the following municipal employees: Bergen County Board of Social Services, Maplewood Township, Millburn BOE, Livingston Dispatchers, and the Borough of West Long Branch.

The CWA Ombudsperson Program

Healthcare Ombudsperson Newsletter

The CWA Healthcare Ombudsperson program has recently launched a quarterly newsletter. This update will feature a combination of news, healthcare tips, and member stories and aims to help our members in the NJ State Health Benefits Program make the most of their benefits, understand their rights, save time, save money, and be healthier. Your Branch President will email you the newsletters as they come out, so check your inbox! Back issues will also be posted on the CWA Local 1031 website, at <https://cwa1031.org/members/health/newsletter>.

Special Health Benefits Open Enrollment for State Workers, Rutgers and UHNJ

More choices are coming to our members enrolled in the State Health Benefits Program. Beginning this summer, Aetna will be returning as a provider option for our health insurance plans. During April, there will be a special open enrollment for members wishing to switch to one of the Aetna plans.

This open enrollment is optional. If you do not wish to change plans, no action is needed.

- This open enrollment can only be used to switch health insurance plans. Changing dependents or dental plans will not be allowed during this time. Dependent changes may continue to be made regularly when there is a qualifying life event that allows it, or they can be done during the regular October open enrollment period.
- Plan changes made during this open enrollment period will go into effect July 1st.
- Regular open enrollment will occur again in October, as usual. During that time, all members will have the opportunity to choose among all the available plans, effective January 1, 2025.
- There will be no changes to any of the existing Horizon Blue Cross-Blue Shield plans. The CWA Unity Direct, OMNIA, HMO, and high deductible plans will all continue to be available.
- Aetna will be offering plans with the same plan design as the current Horizon Plans. These equivalent plans will be identical, with the same cost structures. The only difference is the Aetna plans will use the Aetna network of providers.
 - CWA Unity Direct -> Aetna CWA Unity Freedom
 - Horizon OMNIA -> Aetna Liberty Plus
 - Horizon HMO -> Aetna HDMO
 - Horizon HDHigh / HDLow -> Aetna Freedom HDHigh/HDLow
- Pharmacy benefits will remain unchanged and will continue to be managed by OptumRX for all members on both Aetna and Horizon plans.

- Members interested in the Aetna Liberty Tiered Network (equivalent to Horizon OMNIA) will be eligible for the same \$1000 incentive offered to OMNIA users. (The \$1000 incentive is only available once; if you have received it for being in OMNIA you may not receive it a second time.)
- Members using Horizon plans to access Direct Primary Care Homes and to participate in the NJ WELL incentive program will continue to have access to those programs if they enroll in Aetna plans.
- If you wish to change plans, complete an open enrollment during the month of April in the Benefitsolver website.

For more information, please visit the CWA Local 1031 Healthcare Ombudsperson page at <https://www.cwa1031.org/members/health> - This page includes links to plan descriptions, cost calculators, and other resources to help you choose the best health plan for your needs.

Both Horizon and Aetna will be offering webinars talking about their plans and networks, and CWA Local 1031 will be hosting their own webinars for members during the later part of the month. **The dates will be announced soon on the local's website and sent to members via email.**

State Workers

Contract Benefits Orientation (CBO) - When the State of NJ, Colleges and Universities hire new employees, they hold New Employee Orientations (NEO) and now a Contract Benefits Orientation (CBO). CWA Stewards are allowed to be present at the NEOs and let the new employees know a little about CWA.

At the new mandatory CBO, the State and CWA both present information to the new employees and discuss info about Health Benefits, Pensions, the Ombudsperson Program, Contract Benefits and Salary Charts. The CBOs are new and are currently being held near Trenton. We are working with the State to see if we can hold these meetings in the North, Central and South Jersey.

Telework - CWA has had several meetings with representatives of the Civil Service Commission, the State and with other Unions to discuss a permanent Telework Program rule. There are several issues with the current pilot policy that CWA must address.

First and foremost, the current policy does not include an enforceable appeal process for those employees who have been denied participation in the program. The current policy only allows us to appeal to the Civil Service Commission. We are seeking a fair, enforceable appeal process that would not just result in an unrealistically high legal standard or a rubber stamp of a department's denial for an individual or a group of workers. CWA continues to advocate for the ability to quickly mediate and arbitrate the denials.

Secondly, the program was to be designed to be inclusive. We are looking to eliminate those groups who have been identified as ineligible and enable more employees the right to apply to telework. Determinations need to be based on an individual's ability to perform their duties remotely. We understand that not every position allows for this.

Lastly, we believe the permanent rule should allow individual departments the latitude to expand the telework program where practicable.

We have not been given **any** indication that the Telework Program will be canceled at the end of June. The new policy will be referred to as a Civil Service regulation, governed by N.J.A.C. Title 4A. As with any new or amended regulation, the Civil Service Commission is required to publish the proposal and allow for public comment prior to voting on adoption.

CWA members will mobilize during the public comment period to ensure our voices are heard and our priorities are reflected in the final regulation.

It may be necessary to extend the current policy if a new rule cannot be adopted prior to the June 30 expiration date. We will continue to provide updates as we have more information to share.

Early Retirement Programs – CWA negotiated a non-layoff clause with the State of NJ during Covid. We were able to do this by delaying our raises. When the timeframe to prevent layoffs expired, several of the Colleges/Universities wanted to layoff employees because the impact of Covid had financially impacted enrollment. CWA and other Unions entered into early retirement plans in order to avoid layoffs. At some Colleges/Universities there were layoffs, but the number of CWA members impacted was drastically reduced by working with the Colleges/Universities on these plans. The result of the early retirement plans reduced the number of CWA members who were laid off and saved the College/Universities money, but it also resulted in the transferring of work to other members. We continue to work on upgrades and look for the Colleges/Universities to rehire as their financial situations improve. We do not want to use these types of programs unless it will protect jobs and prevent layoffs.

Office of the Secretary on Higher Education (OSHE) – Trenton NJ- OSHE is a small department which shares a building with many other State departments and CWA workers. CWA has been notified that the parking lot will be torn up and work will be done by PSE&G beginning in April or May. CWA is speaking with the State of NJ to try and expand Telework during this time. Management teams of the impacted workers are not opposed to expanding telework, but the State has the final decision making power. The impact of the construction will drastically

reduce the parking. These talks continue and we will keep you posted when we have a resolution.

Rutgers

At Rutgers, we continue to follow up with Labor Relations and Compensation on outstanding Issues. We recently were able to get some members at the UBHC upgrades based on market rates, experience and education. We continue to fight with Rutgers about how far back the retro should be paid. We are also fighting for the titles that were denied market rate increases, as well as those members who were denied part of the raises because they were in a different bargaining unit.

We worked with the Collation of Rutgers Unions (CRU) to negotiate a telework program that will now be part of all our contracts. This program, although not perfect, provides rules for those who can telework. This program can be viewed on the CWA website under Rutgers.

We held a Shop Steward Training on April 3rd and will introduce our new Stewards in the near future.

UHNJ

At University Hospital of NJ (UHNJ) we are getting ready to negotiate a new contract. We are working with Compensation on new salaries for lab workers whose hours will expand from 35 to 37.5 hours a week and the impact on other lab supervisors. We have been working with the hospital on information and funding for a new hospital. Many of our members have been moved around as construction plans progress. We are working to ensure that UHNJ does not promote supervisors to managers just to give them a raise. This is an ongoing discussion about duties and salaries. And we meet with Senior Management quarterly to discuss issues.

Rowan SOM

The Rowan School of Osteopathic Medicine (SOM) was formerly part of UMDNJ. We hold a separate contract from the main campus and have been working for the last 10 years to provide the SOM CWA workforce parity to the main campus. The last two contracts have provided the SOM members a lot of the same language as the CWA State Worker contract. We are currently in negotiations with the State and Rowan regarding steps, parking fees and Juneteenth. Our most recent session was cancelled because the State's outside counsel has left the firm. We are waiting on new dates from the State of NJ.

Municipal and Library Contracts

Library Contracts – As stated previously, the Local represents 25 Libraries. It is important to note that funding for the libraries is different in each town and the contracts expire at different times. Here is what is going on in our libraries:

- **Bergenfield Public Library** - Negotiations will begin in April for the next contract.
- **Bloomfield Public Library** - A three year contract was ratified in January.
- **Chatham Public Library** – A three year contract was ratified in January. The members were all brought up to the NJLA minimums.
- **Clifton Public Library** – Negotiations are in progress for a new contract.
- **Cranford Public Library** - Negotiations are in progress for a new contract.
- **East Brunswick Public Library** – EBPL organized with Local 1031 last year and we are in negotiations for a first contract. One of the big issues is that part-timers not getting paid during emergency closures. The membership held a rally on Saturday, March 16th, and later that week we presented the Library Board with signatures in support of a fair contract. The EBPL Board responded by declaring an impasse. CWA has filed a ULP and responded to the impasse allegations. We are waiting to meet with a mediator.
- **Edgewater** – A three year contract was settled last year.
- **Elizabeth Public Library** - Negotiations are in progress for a new contract.
- **Glen Rock Public Library** – This contract expires at the end of 2024.
- **Highland Park Public Library** - Negotiations will begin in April for the next contract.
- **Hoboken Public Library** – Local 1031 organized HPL last year and negotiations should begin soon.
- **Irvington Public Library** – Negotiations are in progress for a new contract.
- **Livingston Public Library** – We have two separate contracts for the supervisors and non-supervisors. The supervisory contract was ratified in early 2023. The non-supervisory contract will expire in December of 2024.
- **Maplewood Public Library** - Negotiations began in March of 2024. We are close to a three-year contract but the Township negotiators have to go back to the Board to see if they will authorize higher raises.
- **Middlesex Public Library** – A ratification meeting is being scheduled for a three-year contract.
- **Millburn Public Library** – This contract will expire in December 2025.

- **Mount Olive Public Library** – A three-year contract will expire in December of 2025.
- **North Brunswick Public Library** – This contract was settled in January of 2023.
- **Nutley Public Library** – We are about to begin negotiations on a new contract.
- **Orange Public Library** - We filed a ULP against Orange where they were selectively giving some members raises without negotiating with the Union. This is illegal and could result in unfair treatment. We also had a worker returned to work after 2 years. We are working on getting her back pay.
- **Rutherford Public Library** – This contract was settled in May of 2023.
- **South Brunswick Public Library** - This contract expires in December of 2024.
- **West Milford Public Library** – Negotiations for a new contract will begin soon.
- **West Orange Public Library** – Negotiations for this contract will begin soon.
- **Westfield Public Library** – This contract expires in December of 2026.

Municipal Contracts

- **Bergen County Board of Social Services** – We are in the process of negotiating this contract.
- **Livingston Dispatchers** - We were able to get this unit significant raises to retain the workforce.
- **Maplewood Township** – We are negotiating a three year contract with Township. We are making changes to some of the titles starting salaries to retain workers. Management is going back to the Town Council to see if they will authorize more money.
- **Millburn Board of Education** - Rich Wolfgang, the CWA Shop Steward, retired after 30+ years with Millburn BOE. The current contract expires on June 30, 2024. Negotiations for a new contract will begin soon.
- **West Long Branch Borough** - We are currently in negotiations for a new contract.

Legislative Issues and the NJ Budget

CWA Legislative Updates

The CWA legislative team keeps the locals informed of what bills are being considered helps us get meetings with legislators and keeps us up to date with elections this next year.

Bills we are watching:

- Safe Staffing has not moved, it is still in Health Committees in Assembly and Senate, but has gained sponsors.
- Family Leave Act Extension has passed the Assembly and is awaiting bill number in the Senate.
- COAH bill on affordable housing has passed the Assembly, and will be heard in Senate Budget Committee.
- Privatization Bill has been introduced S1518/A919 and is in Senate and Assembly Labor Committee.
- Tax Deduction for Union Dues bill has still yet to be introduced.
- A Bill designed to gut the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) was being fast-tracked in the legislature. As proposed, it would have gut information the public can request. Thanks to the actions of our members and other unions, this bill was pulled. A new version of the bill will be re-introduced soon.
- **Freedom to Read Act (S242/A3446)** Protects library workers from book banning and lawsuits. This is important to Local 1031 since we represent so many libraries and library workers at the State Colleges. The bill prevents book banning and protects public libraries and employees from harassment.

CWA Priorities in This Year's Budget

- Full funding of pension (totaling \$7.1 billion)
- CBT is "Corporate Transit Fee" for corporations making 10 million in profits or more
- \$5 million dollars to launch a "Nursing Workforce Initiative" - workforce programs designed to ensure future nurses have experienced faculty and the resources they need to complete their training.

FHE – Mental Health Support

Many of you have seen presentations from Janet Gerhard of FHE. She is funny and lively when she shares stories from her life, family and of workers who have had issues with addiction and mental health. CWA Local 1031 offers our members FHE as a resource for you and your families. FHE works with our members' insurance and helps to ensure that cost is not an obstacle to getting help.

FHE is a nationally-recognized, dually-accredited behavioral health treatment facility that offers the highest quality care. For the last 20 years, the mission of FHE has been to provide safe effective, medically integrated behavioral healthcare to empower their clients and families to live loving and inspired lives. Addiction and mental health are complex diseases and there isn't a one-size fits all treatment. FHE has several cutting edge treatments.

If you or a family member is struggling, please contact FHE and Janet at::

Main number (866) 276-1610 Website: www.FHEHealth.com

Janet's info: (267) 249-0513 Email: JGerhard@FHEHealth.com

WILD Conference

The NJ AFL-CIO held its annual Women In Leadership Development (WILD) Conference on March 1st and 2nd. March is Women's History month. The keynote speaker was Liz Shuler, the first woman President of the AFL-CIO. There were workshops about Women's Workplace Wellness by Janet Gerhard and Labor's Role in Democracy by Jennifer Rodriguez, Political Director at the AFL-CIO. **The AFL-CIO is asking us to register voters and get involved in this year's elections.**