

AFGE Local 2199

Newsletter 6/1/23

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We Calling all AFGE 2199 members!! we are looking for self-driven individuals that have a passion to help others and to make the VA a safer, better, place to be employed.



Upcoming Events

Local 2199 is going to be doing t-shirt to show local AFGE pride. There will be a design contest for 3 categories, Local 2199, Local 2199 Pride , and Local 2199 BLACK. More details to come.

Membership Meeting

Membership meetings are held every 2nd Wednesday of the month. We welcome all to attend. The link to attend the meetings are on the website and once you book the meeting then the link will be sent to you via email.

Lunch & Learn

New Year, new dates for leadership to be swinging by all CBOCS to check in and see how things are going and for questions and info sessions.

LIFE

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2023 Caucus Results

Congratulations to Election Winners

National VP Re-Elected
Tim Snyder

National Women's Advisory Coordinator
Katherine Foley

National Fair Practices Affirmative Action Coordinator
Ili Moliga- Meaole



7 Things You Didn't Know Happening at VA Hospitals

May 22, 2023

The Department of Veterans Affairs operates one of the largest healthcare systems in the nation, providing care to over 9 million veterans at nearly 1,300 facilities.

The VA's veteran-specific expertise cannot be replicated outside of the VA. Its model for integrated care sets industry standards and should be a model for all care.

In addition, veterans love their local VA's, which not only provide them the specific treatment they need but also serve as their community and support system.

This top-notch care the VA provides to our country's heroes cannot be carried out without the hard-working people of the VA. AFGE National VA Council First Vice President Mary Jean "MJ" Burke [testified](#) before a congressional hearing last week regarding working conditions, recruitment and retention of doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals at VA facilities across the country. Burke detailed what's happening at VA facilities and what needs

to be done to make the VA a better place to work.

“I consider my decision to work for VA as one of the best decisions I’ve made professionally,” said Burke. “VA must course correct to be able to continue to provide top-notch care to veterans who prefer to seek their care at the VA.”

Here are 7 things you may not know about the VA and its workforce:

1. The VA is struggling to keep current employees

According to the VA’s 2023 first quarter vacancy report, VA turnover has been increasing in recent quarters and is now at nearly 10%, compared with 6.1% governmentwide. Although VA reports a net hiring of 7,364 employees through March, its own data still show over 70,000 vacancies.

A recent survey of AFGE membership showed that 96% of respondents believe their facility needs more frontline staff and 77% said that there are vacant positions for which no recruitment is taking place.

2. Noncompetitive pay is one of the reasons the VA can’t keep doctors

The current pay system for physicians, dentists and podiatrists is composed of market pay, performance pay and longevity pay. When the VA rolled out the three-tiered system pay system, it was intended to make pay more competitive with local markets and to incentivize individual professional performance, while also rewarding retention and experience.

However, since this pay system was enacted nearly two decades ago, there have been widespread inconsistencies with processes for setting market pay and performance pay. Market pay data are no longer required to be publicly reported in the Federal Register, so it is difficult to know how “market pay” is set and allocated.

This has resulted in doctors working at facilities in similar markets receiving

radically different market pay. Long-serving, experienced, highly credentialed clinicians sometimes receive lower market pay than new employees in the same facility.

Performance pay distribution has also been inconsistent. In some facilities, performance pay functions as a retention bonus or award. However, providers should expect to receive performance pay if they meet the performance goals as a component of their salary. In other facilities, the metrics used to assess performance don't align with what is in the physician's control and therefore can be unattainable. For example, a doctor may not get performance pay because it is tied to the number of appointments kept but that number may be affected by the number of no shows, which is not in the doctor's control and tends to be high at the VA.

Short-sighted strategies to recruit new employees at the expense of existing employees only exacerbate problems with retention as new doctors increasingly see VA as a good place to train but not to stay. VA must develop policies that will attract physicians over the continuum of a career and across the spectrum of specialties and pay levels; otherwise fixes to one set of problems will only create new ones.

3. Staffing shortages have taken its toll on frontline medical workers who have to shoulder unrealistic workload

If VA frontline workers were motivated solely by income, they would choose the higher paying jobs in the private sector. Because VA by law cannot be a pay leader, the agency has historically appealed to doctors, nurses, and other frontline workers drawn to serve its unique patient population while having a good work-life balance.

But the VA's overuse of data metrics to try to increase productivity has driven hard-to-recruit personnel into the private sector. The combination of clinician shortages that are driving up pay outside the VA while exacerbating VA

employee workloads are making the VA a less attractive place to work.

4. Nurse pay is a mystery

The VA is mandated to perform third-party registered nurse locality pay surveys, which are triggered by factors such as turnover rates, resignations due to dissatisfaction with pay, or other criteria set by the facility director.

But it is mostly a big mystery when or if surveys are being conducted.

Directors are required to decide within 30 days after receiving the survey data back whether an increase is warranted. If an increase is warranted, it should be implemented within the pay period of that decision.

But VA's lack of transparency about the underlying information needed to calculate turnover and vacancy rates makes it hard to determine whether the agency is compliant with its legal obligations.

AFGE has often been denied access to pay data, which undermines our ability to monitor whether surveys are being conducted in a timely and appropriate way.

5. Staffing Shortages lead to unpredictable shifts

Shifts and days off have become less predictable due to staffing shortages. Despite their preference to work with veterans, nurses will leave for the private sector where they can get predictable schedules and better pay.

Nursing supervisors often lack the hands-on experience to understand the experiences and needs of front-line nurses. Nurses fear they will be punished with a bad schedule or have requests for days off denied if they speak up.

In addition, private sector nurses have extensive collective bargaining rights that are absent at the VA, including the right to bargain over pay and patient safety issues.

6. HR Smart is not exactly smart

The VA's transition to HR Smart and a virtual environment has depersonalized the HR process, leaving unions and employees further marginalized from efforts to recruit and retain frontline workers.

Union representatives, for example, are now forced to go to the USA Jobs website to find out what positions are being recruited. The paper organizational charts which showed which positions have been funded or approved are not easy to locate or are nonexistent. As a result, it is difficult to know what the true VA vacancy rate is.

7. Widespread human resource errors make hiring and retaining employees difficult

Prospective employees accept VA job offers based on salaries, duties and schedules outlined in tentative offer letters. But when they report to the job, they are informed by HR or their manager that their salary, job description or schedule differs from the offer made by VA. These new employees may have given notice at a previous job, declined a competing offer, or relocated based on these erroneous offers.

Both new and current employees have also been hit with debt letters when HR discovers that they were paid more than they should have due to a coding or job offer mistake by HR. The employees are informed that not only will they receive a wage or salary reduction, but that the payroll department will claw back the money already paid to them. This has been an ongoing issue and the VA doesn't have any plan to prevent coding mistakes from happening again. Besides, employees can't file a grievance over paycheck errors due to restrictions under Title 38 even if it's clear that VA is at fault.



AFGE IS PROUD TO CELEBRATE

JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

AFGE Celebrates Jewish American Heritage Month

May 30, 2023

AFGE is proud to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month! Jewish Americans have played a significant role both in the labor and civil rights movements. For example, more than half of the young people who participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 were also Jewish Americans. Most of the white people who participated in a sit in at a white-only lunch counter in solidarity with the courageous Black men were Jewish Americans. Samuel Gompers, a Jewish immigrant from the UK, helped found the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, which later became the American Federation of Labor, as well as the International Labor Organization.

Across the labor community and right here at AFGE, we have Jewish Americans who are helping advance the rights of working families. We are grateful for all the ways they contribute their time and talents to the mission of our federation.

This month we sat down with Frank Silberstein, senior steward for AFGE Local 2782 representing employees at the U.S. Census Bureau in Washington, D.C. He

has also served as the national fair practices affirmative action coordinator for District 14 since 2014.



Tell us a little bit about your job and your union journey

The U.S. Census Bureau has employed me as a mathematical statistician since 1999. After joining the U.S. Census Bureau in 1999, I soon decided to jump right in and find ways to work for justice and to ensure more fairness in the federal government when I saw that unions can do an excellent job protecting employees from abuse.

AFGE was actually my third union job. Previously I worked as a trouble shooter/tester for an aeronautical company while in college under the IAM (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers) and then under AFT (American Federation of Teachers) as a high school teacher in Baltimore. I knew union jobs were much better and surely needed.

What kind of support do you need from the American people to help you and your colleagues carry out your mission?

We need the American people to better understand that workers need a fine balance between workers' rights and employers' rights. The right balance protects everyone and makes for efficient and good production as well as content workers. When the public goes to the polls they should listen well to workers and unions when that balance is threatened.

Are you a member of any Jewish heritage group? What issue/challenge facing the Jewish community are you most concerned about?

I am a member of Jews United for Justice, an AFL-CIO affiliated group, and the Jewish Labor Committee. I am also the current vice president of Am Kolel, a progressive Jewish synagogue in the DC metropolitan area.

One area I am greatly concerned about is the gradual rise in antisemitism. My own family members belong to Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh where 11 Jews were murdered in October 2018. I have been there several times for family celebrations, and it's absolutely chilling to see the amount of senseless hatred that has been running through this country lately.

Anything else you want to add regarding Jewish Heritage Month?

The Jewish community stands for justice and tolerance of all people, and we appreciate the similar support and understanding of good people everywhere.

Want to learn more about Jewish Americans?

Check out the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia.

Explore the connections among the Jewish and labor communities by following the Jewish Labor Committee, an independent secular 501(c)3 organization, the voice of the Jewish community in the labor movement and the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community.



AFGE Wins Union Election at EPA Facility in Michigan

May 30, 2023

A discovery that remote workers at an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) facility in Ann Arbor, Mich., were about to get kicked out of the bargaining unit led an AFGE local to spring into action and save the employees' workplace rights.

AFGE Local 3907 President Tricia Paff was on the AFGE-EPA contract negotiations team last year when she learned that remote workers at multiple EPA facilities were about to be removed from the bargaining unit after their duty station was changed. Paff said remote work was brand new to EPA, and she heard that changing a person's duty station could impact some of the certifications based on how they're written.

As she and the AFGE EPA Council were investigating the issue, she reached out to her local HR to find out more about it. The Ann Arbor Human Resource Director confirmed that her facility was indeed one of them. Their remote

workers were about to lose their union protections.

Thanks to their good working relationship at the local level, the action was postponed until June 1 to allow both parties to work things out as our union insisted remote workers were not supposed to be removed from the bargaining unit.

AFGE subsequently held union elections for 19 remote workers earlier this month, and the employees voted for AFGE and therefore won't lose their union protection.

Paff credited National Vice President for District 7 Jason Anderson, AFGE Assistant General Counsel Julia Turner, National Organizer Jessica Dobles, and District 7 National Representative Vince Schraub for their assistance on the case.

The fact that hers is a small office and that she has a good working relationship with her HR helped tremendously.

“I'm happy that more people have access to union protection,” she said. “It shouldn't be based on where they're working. They're all working for the Environmental Protection Agency.”

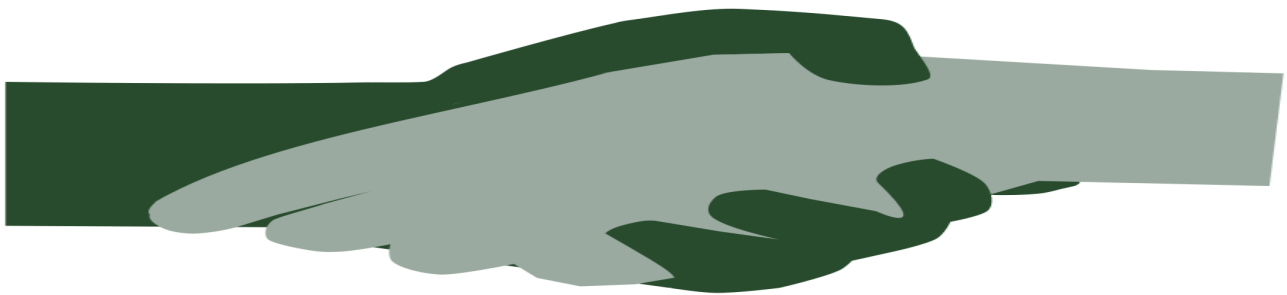


Your partnership with AFGE doesn't have to end when you retire.

AFGE Retirees are front and center in our efforts to honor and defend government employees. That means advocating for a productive, healthy, and secure retirement as well as good jobs, pay, and benefits for those who are still working.

- Stay connected with friends through social activities and volunteer opportunities
- Keep informed about issues affecting retired and active government employees
- Take action to protect retirement security, jobs, and government employee pay
- Save money on a host of benefits – Retirees receive all AFGE discounts and benefits
- Share your skills with the next generation of union leaders and activists

LEARN AND LEAD



BECOME A STEWARD

Transparency and Availability

Union officers are to provide more transparency and availability. What does this mean for the members? This means that if you need a rep to assist you then you will get one quickly. If you want to know what is happening in the local chapter, then we will have a monthly briefing to inform you of upcoming events. Our goal is to keep everyone informed of local events and events happening on the national level that will affect the VA and the employees.

AFGE LOCAL 2199 Union

President — Robert Johnson
Treasurer/Secretary- Tina Dameron
Executive Vice President - Jeff VanCuren
VHA Vice President - Lisa-Marie Manning
VBA Vice President -Susan (Jackie) Neilsen
Sergeant At Arms - Caitlinn Tanaka
Chief Steward - Robert Malone
Fair Practice/YOUNG Cord. - Taylor Wensel
PRIDE Coordinator- Eli Blevins
B.L.A.C.K.- Coordinator-Kendra Childs
APOWER Coordinator-Caitlinn Tanaka
HISCO Coordinator- VACANT

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Facebook - [Local 2199](#)