



What is UDA?

- United Defense Advocates of Minnesota is a member-driven and member-created union of Minnesota Public Defense Workers. We advocate for better working conditions for our members and to improve the lives of our clients. Our mission is to empower public defense workers and fight for justice in our communities.
- The current executive board of UDA consists of Chris Lynch, Jiaqi Li, and Lindsey Van Beek. The board members have a long history of union involvement, a deep fund of knowledge of PELRA and related law, and experience working both in the metro area and out-state.
- Once a bargaining unit joins UDA, they will be able to vote member representatives onto the executive board. For more information, bylaws are available upon request.
- **How much would membership in UDA cost?** There is a \$10 initiation fee due at sign up. Dues will be \$35 per pay period for attorneys and \$25 per pay period for support staff.

Why the Teamsters are no Longer Working for Us.

1. Negotiation Issues

- a. For years, the Teamsters refused to allow any demands to be made until after the Board of Public Defense had already set their budget and sent it to the legislature. When a member first floated the idea of trying to have a say in BOPD budget requests, our Business Agent Gus Froemke called that member stupid.
- a. For several years, the Teamsters refused to make (or allow members to make) a proposal for pay parity with prosecutors. It was the members who formed a committee, did the research, put together a proposal. The union still did not believe that presenting this was a good idea.
- b. Ultimately, the committee forced the unions hand, and the parity scale was presented to the board. The proposal was unanimously approved by the BOPD and ultimately incorporated into the contract.
- c. However, the Teamsters didn't even do that part right, as they way under-estimated what the cost would be to implement the parity plan.

- d. While the Teamsters did some work at the legislature, it's important to know that Jamie Becker-Finn spearheaded the push for PD pay raises, and she did so long before the Teamsters got involved.
- e. During negotiations of contracts, Gus Froemke insists that all proposals being in writing, while this is deemed best practices, this results in a drastic limitation of back and forth. The lawyers present during negotiations have received pushback from the Teamsters when they have suggested engaging in dialog. When there can be dialog, Brian Aldes insists on being the only one to speak.
- f. At the last negotiations, Brian Aldes tried to convince us to accept an earlier, worse offer than the one we finally settled on. He also tried to push us to mediation (which slows down the process and completely takes us out of the same room as the employer) only partway through day two. We were able to settle on a contract only after some of the bargaining committee took over the discussions and a true dialogue was had. If we had been able to do that earlier, we would have gotten a contract significantly sooner.

2. Grievance Issues

- a. If an employee has a grievance, there is a three-step process. Step one would be for the employee and their steward to meet with the employee's direct manager and chief. Step two would be to with employee and their steward to meet with the Kevin Kaier and Bill Ward. If an adequate outcome is not achieved through these two steps, it is the Teamsters who get to decide if the employee gets to go to arbitration. If the Teamsters decide the employee's issue warrants arbitration, the Teamsters may assign the employee a lawyer. The current lawyer they are using is from a metro law firm, Kelly and Lemmons. The lawyer is a city prosecutor who is opposing counsel on many cases in Ramsey and Washington Counties. The idea of having to have opposing counsel represent us on a grievance is preposterous.
- b. There have been several instances across the state where the Teamsters have refused to allow employees to go to arbitration or have pressured employees to take deals that the employees did not like.

3. Lack of Transparency and Respect

- a. Over the summer, the Teamsters alleged that two stewards out of Hennepin County were engaged in promoting a separate union. In response, they scheduled a mandatory steward meeting—the dates they selected were dates that the stewards were unavailable (one was in China with poor and intermittent internet access, the other was in DC for a training with events most evenings). They refused to change the meeting time so the stewards could actively participate. The meeting was still raucous, with several stewards lamenting the lack of process, pointing out the lack of evidence (all they had was hearsay in a heavily redacted email), and suggesting the Teamsters reach out to members in Hennepin to see their position. Brian Aldes said during that meeting that it was ultimately 100% his decision whether stewards remained or not. A second meeting was held. The stewards present were only provided one opportunity to speak for up to 5 minutes. Brian Aldes then read from a pre-prepared statement that the two stewards were summarily removed as representatives. It was clear to those present that the decision had been made before the meeting and before listening to the stewards. When asked what his authority was to do so (given stewards are elected), he simply said there's nothing that stops him. Since then, the stewards that spoke against the lack of process have been cut out of all

communications by the Teamsters. Hennepin is still officially without any attorney stewards, although the two original stewards continue to provide worker support, and 320 has made but feeble and unsuccessful attempts to recruit new ones.

- b. When it came time for budget preparations for this upcoming budget cycle, the Teamsters once again severely under-estimated the costs for a step raise and COLA for all members. They ignored steward's emails bringing this to their attention. Instead, they emailed the "pro-Teamsters" contingent that the Teamsters would be supporting the BOPD budget full stop. This is despite an earlier promise that we would once again address the board prior to them passing a budget proposal.
- c. The Teamsters regularly propose or suggest things such as comp-time cashout, additional deferred compensation options, and cell phone reimbursement. These proposals appear to be nothing but disingenuous. They have never taken the time to cost out how much these would cost and include that in any budget proposal. In fact, this year the survey they sent out asking for opinions on these things as far as bargaining priorities was done after they'd already (incorrectly) budgeted a salary proposal. When a steward pointed this out, that steward was ignored. It appears these proposals are simply throwaway lip service—another way to make it seem as if they are doing something, but they never actually follow through.

Why UDA and not a national union?

This question has a practical answer and an optimistic answer.

- The practical answer is that we simply can't jump straight from the Teamsters to another established national union. We have reached out to several established unions, and while there has been interest in taking us on, no one has agreed to do so without agreement by the Teamsters. This is either due to a "no poaching" policy or fear of reprisal by the Teamsters.
- The other answer is this: who can advocate for ourselves and our clients better than we can? Who understands us better? Who knows better what we need? Who better understands our organization and its leaders? Who out there is better and more practiced at negotiation? Many folks believe we will be more successful simply advocating for ourselves.
- Even so, once we negotiate a new contract as UDA, we would easily be able to affiliate with another national union. This can either be a new state of being or a simple steppingstone into a new and better national. Time will tell.

What about the practicalities?

We have been working with a law firm that is experienced in representing workers in union and workplace grievance matters. They have been assisting us with the creation of UDA. Once UDA is formed and begins assessing dues, we will have more than enough money to contract with them for our labor law needs. We also have an experienced lobbyist who has agreed to help and provided details about what that entails including what it will cost. Beyond that, the running of the union will be done by workers elected to the executive board.

What are the next steps?

- We are gathering signatures on cards to file to ask for an election. We can file for an election no sooner than early March. If 30% of a bargaining unit signs cards, that will trigger an election. If a majority of the bargaining unit votes to join UDA, then it becomes our new union and is empowered to negotiate our next contract. After that point, we can choose to affiliate with a national union at any time (and we expect many will be willing to take us) or continue as our own organization.
- Signing a card is not signing on for membership. You can vote to join UDA without signing on as a member (though we hope the lower membership fees and better representation will convince you to join). All cards are kept confidential, so the Teamsters will not be aware of who signed one and who did not.
- The hope and/or expectation is that eventually the Teamsters will give up and let us go. They do not have a dedicated organizer and likely don't have the resources needed to engage in a statewide organizing push like this one. They are relying on lack of information, bullying, and propaganda to keep us.

For More Info:

uniteddefenseadvocatesminnesota.org

