



**COVID concerns**

## Parents - the first line of defense

By **DON MONCRIEF**  
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Parents. Nobody needs to tell you that “you” are the best defense in all things related to your child’s health. You already know that. It is inherent within you.

Doctor’s, nurses and others may play their role, but you being proactive, vigilant and at the ready, as again you know, could make/makes all the difference in the world.

That said, if your child begins showing any signs related to COVID – this obviously applies to all sickness/illness – don’t hesitate to get her seen by a physician.

Also, let your conscious – motherly instincts, etc - be your guide. If you feel your son or daughter should be tested, insist on it. We had one of our Local 987 grandparents recently take her grandchild to the doctor. The child was demonstrating signs of COVID (see below) but they were not going to check/test

her. The grandparent insisted and sure enough. She tested positive.

Again, there are many in the world you “can” trust with your child’s health, but they’re counting on there being none greater than “you”.

You’ve undoubtedly seen this, but here’s a reminder of the most common symptoms of COVID, according to the CDC:

Most common symptoms include:

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Dry cough
- ▶ Tiredness

Less common symptoms:

- ▶ Aches and pains
- ▶ Sore throat
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Conjunctivitis
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Loss of taste or smell
- ▶ A rash on skin, or discoloration of fingers or toes

Serious symptoms:

- ▶ Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- ▶ Chest pain or pressure
- ▶ Loss of speech or movement

## The work behind the wins; all cases in fact

By **DON MONCRIEF**  
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Eleven years backpay.

That is just one win the Local has garnered on behalf of its members – the most recent example. There was lot behind that win, as there is with every win, said AFGE Local 987 Sergeant-at-arms Sam Berry, who helped orchestrate it.

First, for background, Berry is brought into the process – per the current operating instructions of President Marion Williams – “after” the Step 1 and Step 2 process has been denied and/or a remedy has not been given and it is invoked into arbitration.

Once involved, he said his first task is “research. I try to get in touch with the steward (for background/details). All I typically get is the Step 2 denial (he points to a folder with very few pieces of paper in it). If I’m lucky I get the



**Sam Berry**

(AFMC Form) 913 (Standard Grievance Form). It’s time consuming.”

That’s an understatement. He’s talking hours and hours and for what could be weeks or months done preparing for what will be the hearing. It, the preparation, also includes putting together a witness list and the hearing itself. For that, he has to prepare an “opening”,

**See WORK, page 3**

## A glimpse into the ‘At Large’ side of the Local

Special to The Union Advocate

*Mike Ferguson serves as the Vice President At Large. There have been a number of things that have occupied his heart, soul, mind and his time. During a recent interview, he wanted to capture just a few of the issues and challenges he confronts on a daily basis.*

*The membership should know that we are winning in every endeavor across the base. Mike represents a diverse population of the base. Each organization brings with it their own special challenges which must be addressed through the grievance, Equal Employment Opportunity and Demand to Bargain processes. Mike wanted to provide a brief glimpse into the At Large side of the base.*

COVID has presented unimaginable challenges as we continue to address the mem-



**Mike Ferguson**

bership needs in grievances, Demand to Bargain, the Equal Employment Opportunity, and the ‘can’t get it right’ appraisal system. In facing the representation challenges, a great number of the ‘At Large’ stewards are teleworking. You would think that would result in a decrease in the number of grievances, EEOs and Demand to Bargain. In fact, as of

**See GLIMPSE, page 3**

### COVID-19 cases in Houston County schools

Aug. 3-5

Total number of COVID-19 positives:

- ▶ Students: 57
- ▶ School-based employees: 7
- ▶ Employees not based at a school: 1
- ▶ Total number of schools with reports of positive cases: 26
- ▶ Total number of students quarantined/isolated from school cases: 137
- ▶ Total number of employees quarantined/isolated from school cases: 9

Aug. 6-12

Total number of COVID-19 positives:

- ▶ Students: 241
- ▶ School-based employees: 27
- ▶ Employees not based at a school: 9
- ▶ Total number of schools with reports of positive cases: 38
- ▶ Total number of students quarantined/isolated from school: 569
- ▶ Total number of employees quarantined/isolated from school: 47

- Source: [www.hcbe.net](http://www.hcbe.net)



**Next membership meeting:  
Sept. 16, 5 p.m.**

**In memory ...**  
**Clifton Antoine**  
Member since April 22, 2010

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## Did you hear it's Easier to File a FECA Claim for COVID-19 now?

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that President Biden signed on March 11, 2021, makes it **much easier** for federal workers diagnosed with COVID-19 to establish coverage under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. To establish a COVID-19 claim, you simply need to establish that you are a “covered employee,” meaning that:

- 1. You were diagnosed with COVID-19.** Specifically, you were diagnosed with COVID-19 while employed in the Federal service at any time during the period of January 27, 2020 to January 27, 2023; and,
- 2. Your duties include any risk of exposure.** Specifically, within **21** days of your diagnosis of COVID-19, you carried out duties that—
  - a. required contact with patients, members of the public, or co-workers; or
  - b. included a risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus.



### What Does the Change in the Law Mean?

- 1. You are only required to establish that your duties included a risk of exposure to COVID-19.** You do not have to prove you were engaged in high-risk employment; that you were actually exposed to the virus; or that you were exposed to someone who had the virus while performing your duties.
- 2. If you establish that you are a “covered employee,” any diagnosed COVID-19 will be deemed to have been proximately caused by your Federal employment.** You no longer have to establish a causal link between your employment and your COVID-19 diagnosis.



### What to Do:

You can quickly and easily file a **CA-1** Claim for COVID-19 through the Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal (ECOMP). You can access ECOMP at [ecomp.dol.gov](https://www.ecomp.dol.gov). If you have never used ECOMP, you can [view this instructional video](#) to learn how to register for an ECOMP account, [and this video](#) to learn how to file a COVID-19 claim. If you don't have access to a computer, contact your supervisor.



### Why File Now? What if I Think I Am OK?

If you were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 or even if you believe you just have a mild case of COVID-19, you should consider filing a COVID-19 FECA claim **now** even if you have fully recovered and/or had an asymptomatic infection.

- In the event you develop a consequential injury, impairment or illness later as a result of your COVID-19 diagnosis, timely filing your claim **now** will facilitate the processing of any future claim for any such consequential condition or impairment.
- If you wait until you experience a consequential injury or illness to file your COVID-19 claim, your claim may be subject to time limitation and you will have to establish **both** the initial COVID-19 claim and the consequential condition claim before benefits can begin.

On March 11, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The new law makes it easier for federal workers diagnosed with COVID-19 to establish coverage under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act.

Section 4016 of the law provides that a federal employee who is diagnosed with COVID-19 and carried out duties that required contact with patients, members of the public, or co-workers, or included a risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus during a covered period of exposure prior to the diagnosis, is deemed to have an injury that is proximately caused by employment.

FECA Bulletin 21-09 (Processing FECA Claims for COVID-19 under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021), issued on April 28, provides more detail on claims processing and requirements.

The impacts of this provision - updated May 6 - are as follows:

- 1. Any COVID-19 claim filed under the FECA that was accepted for COVID-19 prior to March 12, is not impacted because coverage for benefits has already been extended.**
- 2. Any COVID-19 claim filed under the FECA that was denied or withdrawn prior to March 12, 2021, is eligible for review under the new eligibility**

requirements.

**3. Any COVID-19 claim filed under the FECA on or after March 12, 2021, will be reviewed solely under the new eligibility requirements.**

**What this means to you**  
**1.** If you previously filed a COVID-19 claim under the FECA that was accepted by OWCP, you can expect no change.

**2.** If you previously filed a COVID-19 claim under the FECA that was denied by OWCP based on a lack of federal exposure or a lack of medical evidence establishing causal relationship, we have now either accepted your case or requested additional information from you in order to consider your

case further.

**3.** If you have never filed a COVID-19 claim under the FECA and you believe you have contracted COVID-19 as a result of your federal employment, you will need to file a CA-1 (Federal Employee's Notice of Traumatic Injury and Claim for Continuation of Pay/Compensation) through the Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal. You can access ECOMP at: <https://www.ecomp.dol.gov>. If you are unable to access ECOMP please contact your employing agency for assistance with filing your claim.

- Source: **U.S. Department of Labor**

# 409th SCMS C-5 Flight manages cargo aircraft's supply chain, keeps Air Force Mission flying

By **HOLLY LOGAN-ARRINGTON**  
Robins Public Affairs

Keeping the military's largest transport aircraft stocked with necessary parts is a mission the 409th Supply Chain Management Squadron C-5 Flight at Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, doesn't take lightly.

The flight, part of the 638th Supply Chain Management Group, provides supply chain management support for multiple C-5 aircraft for the Air Force. The flight develops and executes enterprise demand and supply plans in order to ensure parts are on the shelf, readily available for field and depot customers that use the heavy cargo planes.

Brian Giberson, C-5 lead equipment specialist in the 409th SCMS, said the C-5 Flight provides support for several of the Air Force's major commands, in addition to offering similar support to other military service branches.

"The ultimate goal of the flight is to provide supply support to the Air Mobility Command, Air Force Reserve Command and the Air Force Space Command, as well as provide interdepartmental support to the Army, Navy and Marines," he said. "The C-5 Flight works together with repair complexes across the Air Force, interdepartmental military repair sources and Defense Department contractors to repair and manufacture C-5 commodities."

Locally, the C-5 Flight supports the Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex, ensuring parts are available when aircraft arrive for programmed depot maintenance, otherwise known as PDM, every eight years, in addition to providing part support and technical guidance to the commodity shops both at Robins and at Hill Air Force Base in Utah.

Kristin Howell, 409th SCMS director, said the 638th SCMG, as a whole, enables mission success beyond Robins' gates.

"The 638th SCMG contributes to the success of the WR-ALC by leading its people and managing its resources during today's challenging environment in order to provide parts on-time to support the Air Force's mission," she said. "This entails managing commodities located throughout the world, forecasting adequate quantities necessary to meet requirements and ensuring fleet availability is maintained to carry out the many Air Force missions across multiple weapon systems."

Emily Floyd, C-5 Flight chief, said her staff implements various methods to manage the C-5 supply chain.

"The C-5 Flight uses multiple data analysis tools to review current and forecasted requirements, allowing the team to strategically plan and ensure parts are available ahead of the need dates for depot and field customers," she said. "The C-5 team continuously analyzes and updates projected buy and repair forecasts, coordinating with users, maintenance squadrons, program offices and major commands, informing stakeholders of conditions that may impact parts availability."

Tim Elliott, a C-5 logistics management specialist in the 409th SCMS, said the C-5 Flight is committed to supporting the cargo aircraft's mission by providing proper supply chain management to keep the Air Force mission going.

"As a part of the 409th SCMS, the C-5 Flight is entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the Air Force's supply pipeline needed to successfully support the heavy cargo mission of the C-5 aircraft," he said. "To do this, the C-5 Flight utilizes the tools, training and funding provided to monitor and support customer requirements and to pursue buy and repair actions needed for those items that fall under our purview."

Floyd said the C-5 Flight is currently working to improve parts supportability for C-5

PDM.

"The flight works closely with the Depot Supply Chain Management Team, strategically reviewing the list of parts that are replaced 100% during PDM," she said. "Together, the teams ensure sufficient assets are in the repair pipeline to support the aircraft upon PDM induction."

Additionally, Floyd said the C-5 Flight works with the C-5 System Program Office and the DSCM Team to review the Supportability Task List prior to each PDM induction.

"The STL is the list of parts with reported damage in accordance with the last minor Pre-Induction Inspection," Floyd said. "The majority of the strategic data analysis and supportability improvement efforts are led by the C-5 DSCM Team."

The 409th SCMS recently added a supply integrator position to ensure the 409th SCMS' supply activities are aligned with the goals and timelines of the 402nd Aircraft Maintenance Group with the WR-ALC. The addition has greatly improved parts supportability for the C-5 PDM, Floyd said.

Jay Harrington, the supply integrator in the 409th SCMS who is co-located with the 402nd AMXG, said the 409th SCMS executes supply chain activities to enable combat power.

"You can't fly without supply," he said. "The 409th team works to ensure supplies are available by partnering with government and commercial suppliers. Every day, members of the 409th SCMS execute buy and repair actions while working to resolve supplier constraints."

"No one liked going to the store last year and finding out there was no toilet paper on the shelf," Harrington said. "The 409th takes that same feeling and works to ensure our Airmen have what they need, when they need it, to complete their mission."

# BBB tip: Making your next home improvement a success

Whether you are remodeling your home, making needed repairs, or sprucing things up to put your house on the market, the following tips will help make your next home improvement project a success.

**Come up with a budget and stick to it.** Home improvement projects can get expensive, fast. If you don't want to break the bank, create a realistic budget to figure out how much you can spend ahead of time. Be upfront with contractors you hire about how much you can spend on a project as well.

**Think about the pros and cons of DIY projects.** If time and motivation is no problem for you, you may be able to tackle some basic home improvement projects on your own, but other projects may require further expertise.

If you don't have a background in construction, it's usually best to hire a contractor to help with larger projects, such as plumbing, tiling, tree removal, exterior painting, and general remodels.

**Give high priority to projects that keep your home clean and safe.** If your home is in need of repairs, take care of those projects first. For example, fix that leaky roof before you give your home's walls a fresh coat of paint. In addition, don't forget to stay on top of regular home maintenance tasks to maximize the cleanliness and safety of your home.

**Up the value of your home with a bathroom or kitchen remodel.** Remodeling your bathroom or kitchen can completely change the look and feel of your home, creating a space you enjoy being in - not to mention it can add quite a bit of value to your home. For large scale remodels, hire a contractor that specializes in construction and remodeling services.

**Improve energy efficiency. Save money (and the environment) by improving the energy efficiency of your home.** Energy saving projects that are worth taking on include checking and replacing the seals on all windows and ducts in your home, or installing new windows.

**Get multiple quotes from contractors.** When you are ready to start your home improvement project, be sure to get multiple quotes from several different companies. Never be pressured into hiring the first person you speak with. Comparing pricing and services is a critical step



**Kelvin Collins**

in choosing a skilled contractor you can trust.

**Properly vet contractors before you hire.** Even if the price is right, don't hire a contractor before doing some research. Check them out or obtain a list of trustworthy contractors at BBB.org.

Ask the contractor to provide references. Pay close attention to any reviews or complaints from previous customers. Remember, complaints are normal in the construction industry so pay attention to how the company handled the complaint.

Verify that the contractor is licensed and insured and get an estimate and contract in writing. Read contracts carefully before you sign them.

**Don't get scammed.** Stay alert to any suspicious behavior on the part of "home improvement specialists." Red flags include not putting things into writing, demanding upfront payment, unexpected price changes, high-pressure sales tactics, unsolicited free inspections (that usually reveal the need for an urgent repair), and cash-only deals.

You can always search BBB.org for more tips or to find reputable roofers, painters, plumbers, and lawn maintenance specialists in your area.

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*Kelvin Collins is president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus. The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB by phone at 1-800-763-4222, our website, BBB.org, or by email at info@central-georgia.bbb.org.*

# Tips for homeowners to prep financially for natural disasters

(StatePoint) Climate change is making natural disasters more extreme, from extending the duration of disaster seasons to increasing the intensity of fires, storms and floods. Indeed, the U.S. Geological Survey notes that with increasing global surface temperatures, the intensity of storms will likely increase. The agency also predicts coastal flooding to double in the coming decades.

Health and safety are first priorities after a disaster, but financial resilience is critical too. If you're a homeowner - or a prospective homeowner - here's how you can get prepared:

- **Compile documents:** Assemble important financial documents. Store paper copies of all files in a fireproof and waterproof box or safe, or in a bank safe deposit box. Consider making digital copies for easy accessibility. Store these in a password-protected format on a removable flash or external hard drive, in your fireproof and waterproof box or safe, in a bank safe deposit box, or with a secure cloud-based service.

- **Understand your insurance coverage:** Having adequate insurance will ensure protection in times of need. The extent of your coverage will depend on where you live and what types of disasters your location may be at risk for. Review your policy annually and make changes or additions as needed.

- **Update documents:** Regularly revisit and update documents, particularly if you have significant changes in your life, such as marriage, death or the birth of a child.

- **Start saving:** If you're able, start saving today. Having an emergency budget allows you to react quickly if you're affected by a disaster. Plus, households that have an emergency savings account tend to fare better overall.

- **Go electronic:** If you depend on regular benefits such as Social Security, consider switching to electronic benefits to protect yourself should mail service be disrupted during a disaster.

- **Know the plans:** Stay up-to-date with the



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) designer491 / iStock via Getty Images Plus

emergency plans in your community, children's schools and place of work. Make a communications plan for your own household and share it with all the members of your family.

- **Seek disaster relief:** If your home has been impacted by a natural disaster, contact your loan servicer right away. Your loan servicer may be able to extend a full range of relief options, including: suspending foreclosures by providing forbearance on your mortgage payments for up to 12 months, waiving assessments of penalties or late fees, and not reporting delinquencies to the nation's credit bureaus. About one month before the end of your forbearance period, contact your mortgage company to determine the most appropriate option for re-establishing your payments.

- **Become a savvy homeowner:** Familiarize yourself with how to prepare your home for natural disasters and extreme weather, as well as where to find resources to help recover if disaster strikes. Freddie Mac's My Home website has a comprehensive suite of tools and resources about homeownership, including details on support options if you are struggling to make your mortgage payments, at myhome.freddie.com/getting-help.

Natural disasters can strike at any time and with little warning. However, proper preparation can help you weather the storm.

# Looking to retire early? Ask yourself these 4 questions

(StatePoint) The pandemic has changed our lives in numerous ways. As a result of all the upheaval, many people are reassessing their priorities and thinking about early retirement. According to Pew Research, 28 million baby boomers retired in 2020 and a recent study found 39 percent plan to retire by 65, while 18 percent said they plan to retire by age 59. Before taking that step, here are four questions to ask yourself.

1. Can I afford to stop working? Look at your retirement savings, your life expectancy, your projected income and annual expenditures in retirement. You'll want to consider unforeseen circumstances down the line that could be costly, such as the need to reside in a nursing home. Use the



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) designer491 / iStock via Getty Images Plus

free retirement calculator and resources available at fidelity.com to help you make a realistic determination as to whether you can afford to retire now, or whether you need to keep earning your full-time salary for a

few more years.

2. Do I need life insurance after retirement? There is no one-size-fits-all answer here. However, those carrying

**See RETIRE, page 3**

# Keep your mind sharp as you age

(StatePoint) September, which is World Alzheimer's Month, is an excellent reminder to keep your mind and body healthy through the years. Experts say that doing so can reduce your risk for cognitive decline. Try taking on these new hobbies to keep your mind sharp as you age:

- **Cooking:** Not only can the development of a new complicated skill such as cooking improve cognitive functions like problem-solving and concentration, but having the ability to create your own nutritious meals at home has the added benefit of being good for brain health. From TikTok tutorials to online classes taught by master chefs, today, there are more avenues for picking up culinary know-how than ever before.



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) designer491 / iStock via Getty Images Plus

- **Music:** Learning to play a musical instrument has countless benefits for brain health, helping improve memory, hand-eye coordination and more. It's also a mood booster, which is important, as depression is con-

sidered a risk factor for dementia. Check out instruments designed to build skills quickly. Whether you're a total novice or taking up the piano after a long hiatus.

**See AGE, page 3**

# THE UNION ADVOCATE

Published by the American Federation of Government Employees Local 987, Warner Robins, Georgia.

Contents of The Union Advocate are not necessarily the official view of AFGE Local 987, or endorsed by the U.S. Government, the Department of the Air Force or The Document Company.

The appearance of advertising in this publication, including inserts, does not constitute endorsement by The Union Advocate, AFGE Local 987 or the Department of Defense.

Publisher  
Judd Publishing  
Company  
Editor/Layout and design  
Don Moncrief

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Editorial content is edited, prepared and provided by AFGE Local 987. Submitted news and editorial content/photographs are welcome - applicability to AFGE Local 987's mission to be determined by the discretion of the editor and/or president.

Please submit articles, photos, etc to don.moncrief@afge-local987.org. For questions about story content, to pass on story ideas or to request coverage, please contact the aforementioned.

**GLIMPSE**

**From page 1**

In this article I can say with certainty that there has not been a decrease.

What you need to know is that we continue to represent the membership through long hours and hard work; we are winning cases on behalf of the membership.

The latest challenge is the lack of guidance in granting COVID leave to employees. With the increase in the number of cases in and around the base, institutionally we need to figure it out. There has to be a cogent policy that is being articulated to the supervisor on the appropriate methods of granting leave to employees that have been exposed and could potentially have an adverse impact on the workforce.

One of the major sticking points are the supervisors' "just say no" attitude in granting leave associated with COVID-related challenges being experienced by employees. The solution being presented by supervisors is to have the employee use their own leave, which makes no sense. I have been fortunate to represent a number of members in the grievance process. Those cases have been reversed and their leave was restored.

In my eyes this is not a win. I was able to have the leave restored, but the bigger issue is the grievance process being used to address something that was created by the first line supervisor's, either a lack of knowledge, or their inability to administer the latest iteration of the COVID, Emergency Leave Act. The program has been shrouded in secrecy since it was approved through the Office of Personnel Management.

I want to briefly touch upon ELA. The program is slated to end sometime during September 2021. The program on the face of it appears to address the needs of the membership by covering a cornucopia of COVID-related medical issues both for children and family members that you are caring for. I have encouraged the membership to take a moment to read the fine print as it pertains to the use of the 600 hours of leave.

As the law is written right now, you will have to make restitution for every hour you use upon retirement from civil service.

Also, there are the challenges that are presented in representing our members assigned to Air Force Reserve Command. Our effort to connect with the leadership of AFRC has been a bit of a challenge. Considering their footprint here on the installation, they face some of the same challenges as any other organization on Robins AFB.

They have their share of EEO's, grievances and Demand to Bargain. Since most of the negotiations on behalf of our members assigned there. They work

extremely hard to maintain the façade of there being a strong partnership and that their supervisors render sound and cogent decisions when it comes to their employees. I have represented a number of our members assigned to AFRC and for the most part our success rate is relatively comparable to those of the rest of the installation.

Where you have people issues in any organization, typically at the root you find supervisors that have not followed the established guidelines. I have availed myself to them to address some of their concerns in relation to moving the Demand to Bargain process forward to have employees return to work safely.

If you hear that the union has brought off on your returning to work, that is simply not the facts. As a member, you have an inherent responsibility of verifying the union's position on any issue that management presents to you in the name of our signing off on it. You have a right in knowing whether there is an agreement between your organization and the union.

The Army Air Force Exchange Services as well as can be expected there has been relatively a calm and a strong commitment from the leadership of AAFES in addressing issues as they arise. I would be remiss if, I did not acknowledge the arrival of Mrs. Tamala McCoy, General Manager of AAFES. We look forward to working with her on behalf of our AAFES members. I have on occasion had to represent employees in the EEO and grievance process when necessitated the union's intervention. We have been able to resolve 100 percent of the cases involving employees within AAFES. Thanks to the previous general managers, I am hopeful this trend can continue with the new leadership. I believe it will.

The Child Development Center has been one of the most difficult organization's on the installation for me to deal with. Over the past five years, there has been a consistent theme of leadership not addressing the structurally rooted factors, that lead to some supervisors harassing and bullying employees by using a surveillance system that was designed to assist Family Advocacy Office with investigating maltreatment or abuse of a child.

I agree wholeheartedly with protecting our children. However, you have armchair supervisors that are too lazy to get out of their offices to interface with employees and correct questionable behavior using a surveillance for the purpose of disciplining employees. I found it puzzling from the perspective of these supervisors having to face the same fate from previous management officials; one supervisor employing these tactics was exposed to some of the same tactics themselves.

Not all sense is common, as was the case of a childcare provider that was disciplined after a vehicle accident where the police were investigating the accident and the member could not leave the scene of the accident. The supervisor directed the member to leave the scene and come to work. It does not work like that. The member was written up for being late. How did we get here? Not only is this a recipe for grievances, it illustrates a sheer lack of leadership ability. Child Development Center, "Weingarten Rights" employees, have a right to have a representative present during an investigatory interview. "No" is not the answer to the request. Until there is accountability and supervisors held accountable for their willful trampling on the rights of employees and the Agency's lack of resolve in holding the lawless supervisors accountable for their transgressions. Given the fact we are an organization of laws and instruction and absent of those two, the supervisor could have it her way. Not today. Follow the rules.

The Defense Commissary Agency is one in which I have a great representative in this area, and I wanted to highlight a few of her accomplishments. Her ability in navigating the choppy waters as an employee and a union steward has made my job in their representation process a little easier.

It has taken a great effort on the part of Local 987 to overcome some of the work-related issues commissary employees were experiencing. That is not to say we have crossed the threshold to "not" having employee issues. Angelia and I recently had to mediate an issue for the meat department. Management did not have a policy in place for shift rotation. Ms. Simmons and I were able to mediate an amicable resolution that made the employees whole.

**WORK**

**From page 1**

have questions for each of the witnesses, and do a closing argument – at the hearing or "written" sometime later, he said.

All in all, it is as mentioned: A time-consuming effort. (Which he will be quick to tell you, "is" worth it when you're talking about helping members who have been "wronged".)

Added into Berry's current operating climate is the fact the Local is, and has been, trying to clear a backlog of cases it inherited, some dating as far back as 2017.

"When in Trusteeship none were heard," he said. "So those were added to the books. On top of that, we were already behind (from new cases coming in once they took office)." Currently, that translates to approximately 300 arbitrations, approximately 30 EEO cases and another five under the Merit System Protection Board.

He continued: "The Agency doesn't want to hear but two a week (which obviously doesn't help)." Sometimes, he added, they – the Agency - will want to "cram" – do three or four a week, but for the most part: "They complain they don't have enough people. Hell, I'm one guy. I mean it's tough. Don't get me wrong. I'm happy to take on this work. I'm not shirking my responsibility, (but) to hear them complain-

ing about not having enough people when they've got like seven people over there ..."

That – the backlog - has also created its own separate sort of problems. For example. One case is old enough Berry has been unable to contact the complainant. Another was a "guaranteed win. They never gave him a proposal. Then fired him. They never gave him a Step 1 or a Step 2." The problem? The person has since passed away. "So there's no remedy to be solved. It should be that you put the guy back in his position, but he's passed. You can't do anything with that." (The Local has not given up, and is still seeking resolution.)

One, from 2018, was ruled against because it was "so old. The arbitrator said, 'Well, you know, nobody has a good memory of what happened then.' And that's in his ruling. He just kind of ruled everybody probably did what they were supposed to do. 'It was probably right.'

"I mean it was a bunch of ... because it was so old, nobody had a good memory? So, we're trying to eliminate that (by getting rid of the backlog)."

Speaking of arbitrators, as you might have guessed, they also add a challenge to the process.

"Your arbitrators are solicited by the base and the Union," Berry said. "So if one is unhappy (the base or the union), they can strike. So, it's in the arbitrators best interest to be

50-50. "In all honesty, you don't want them to be that way. You would rather them rule that the Agency messed up every time. Every time, they (the Agency) lose. Every time, they're struck. The next guy comes in. They do the same thing. Sooner or later (they come to the realization) 'We're going to arbitration. We're going to lose.' So, they stopped doing that (to an employee)."

He added: "I like to believe they rule like they should in relation to the facts." (The "facts" he's referring to are typically those found in AFIs and the Master Labor Agreement.) However, to preserve their job so to speak, they can't. They've really got to give and take some.

"Still (given the choice), I would rather them just rule on the merits of the case."

Hardships. Difficulties. Wins, and yes, sometimes losses – sometimes "draws" even, as was the result of one case in which Berry said the arbitrator ruled the Agency was wrong but still wouldn't give his client the monetary compensation due.

Hardships. Low-staffing. Long-hours. These are some of the challenges endure/overcome in service to its members. Not every case will reap an 11-year backpay but every case will be prepared with the due diligence as if it will.

**Get your issues heard and answered:**  
[afgeactionline@local987.org](mailto:afgeactionline@local987.org)

**Do you know?**  
 What is a union?  
 And why should you join?

People who aren't in a union or don't know anyone in a trade or labor union are often unsure what labor unions do and why someone would join.

**WHAT IS A UNION?**

Labor unions strive to improve the lives of all working families – to bring economic justice to the workplace and social justice to our nations.

It's all about making sure working families receive what they deserve. A labor union or trade union is an organized group of workers who unite to make decisions about conditions affecting their work.

**WHO ARE UNION MEMBERS?**

There are over 60 unions representing over 14 million workers throughout the country.

No matter what work you do, there's a union that represents your work. Teachers, miners, firefighters, farmworkers, bakers, engineers, pilots, public employees, doctors, nurses, plumbers, bus drivers, office workers, computer professionals and so many more professions all have unions.

**BENEFITS OF BELONGING TO A UNION**

One of the big reasons that workers join a union is to ensure fair treatment in the workplace. As a union member, people usually\* have a collective voice regarding:

- Pay & wages
- Work hours
- Benefits – including retirement plans, health insurance, vacation, sick leave, tuition reimbursement, etc.
- Working conditions
- Ways to balance work and family
- Best ways to get work completed
- Other work-related issues

\* (Only DC government AFGE members are permitted to bargain over pay, wages and/or benefits)

Another advantage of belonging to a union is that members earn 30% more than non-union workers. And if you're a union worker, you are also much more likely to have health and pension benefits.

In addition, unions give workers a strong collective voice that's heard in government. Unions represent workers in talk with lawmakers and remind politicians that working families voted them into office.

**RETIRE**

**From page 2**

debt into retirement, such as mortgages and personal loans, should consider a life insurance plan. Today, many baby boomers are financially supporting children and grandchildren and have significant debt.

According to the National Council on Aging, the median consumer debt for households headed by someone aged 65 or older is 4.5 times higher now than in 1989. Paying off a mortgage is one of the most common reasons to purchase a life insurance policy. Doing so can help ensure your family is able to enjoy the home they love without the burden of outstanding payments.

3. How will I get health insurance? The current Medicare eligibility age for most people is

65, so if you plan retire before then, you'll need to find another way to get health insurance. Even after you're covered by Medicare, health care expenses can add up, especially if you're on a fixed retirement income. Some insurance companies, including Erie Insurance, offer Medicare supplemental insurance to help pay the portion of expenses not covered by Medicare.

4. How will I spend my time? Retirement can come with ample newfound free time you may not be accustomed to. While that can sound amazing to those working full-time, the transition can be jarring.

Whether it's volunteering, taking up new creative hobbies or traveling, planning now for how you will spend your time is a good idea to stave off boredom.

active social life can improve brain function. Unfortunately, if you aren't proactive about it, there are not always that many opportunities to make new friends in adulthood. Whether it's a sewing circle or a bowling league, consider joining a club or team for camaraderie and fun.

**AGE**

**From page 2**

- Exercise: The mind-body connection is strong. For ultimate brain health, stay physically active; and if you can do so outdoors, all the better. Research suggests that connecting with nature is good for one's mental well-being, reducing stress, anxiety and depression. Support your journey with tools that track your activity and inspire you to delve further into adventures, whether that be hiking, fishing or rock climbing.
- Camaraderie: Having an



Brought to you by AFGE's Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation (Y.O.U.N.G.)

Learn more at [afge.org/wfp](http://afge.org/wfp)

