**PEF Region 8 PAC Meeting Minutes**

**April 12, 2022**

**6:00 PM In-Person/Zoom Hybrid Meeting**

**Attendees:**

*Remote:* Bruce Giddings, Carmela Triolo, Kevin E James, Martin Robinson, Greg Marra, Kate Richardson, Jeanette Santos, Catherine DellAngelo, Paul Burns, Kaleb Winters, Jim Desso, Prakash Lal

*In Person:* Danielle Bridger, Mike Kuzia-Carmel, Mario Chiarello, Ken Ferro, Sheryl Sperry, Chris O’Neill, Michael Blue, Mickey Dobbin, Myron Getman, Sharon De Silva, Patrick Lyons

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

* Danielle Bridger called meeting to order at 6:08 PM.

1. **ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA**
   * Michael Blue made a motion to accept the agenda as written; Sheryl Sperry seconded the motion – agenda was accepted without objection.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
   * Michael Blue made a motion to accept minutes from March 8, 2022 R8 PAC meeting. Danielle Bridger seconded the motion and minutes were accepted without edits.
3. **REGION COORDINATOR COMMENTS \*Note: the Region 8 Coordinator Comments occurred following the update from Patrick Lyons.\***
   * Statewide PAC met yesterday (April 11, 2022). The Statewide PAC has requested that all regional PACs review and approve current committee rules.
   * The current R8 PAC rules are from 2007; updated rules were developed in 2019 but were never voted on/approved by the full committee.
   * Sharon De Silva asked if the initiative is to form a subcommittee to review the 2007 rules or get comments from the full committee? There was significant discussion regarding the PAC rules.
   * Member asked what was the rationale behind not adopting the 2019 updated rules? Michael Blue, who was the R8 Coordinator at that time, will follow-up.
   * ***\*Members were asked to review the current R8 PAC rules (handout to in-person attendees; will be emailed to virtual attendees) and provide feedback ahead of next meeting.\****
4. **GUEST – PATRICK LYONS**
   * Patrick Lyons is the Legislative Director for PEF. Mr. Lyons gave a comprehensive update regarding the budget negotiations between PEF, the Governor’s Office, the New York State Assembly and the New York State Senate. Mr. Lyons began with a high level overview of the PEF budget priorities:
     + Pension reform was a priority negotiating item for PEF (more below). This is key for the union and more broadly the statewide public sector workforce to attract and retain more new employees.
     + PEF was instrumental in negotiating $200 million to address OPWDD staffing shortages and stem recent closure of facilities statewide.
     + New York State received approximately $1 billion in federal aid; the disbursement of these funds was a focus of the budget negotiations.
     + Parole reform was another PEF focus; the union has been supportive of the “Less is More” statute which emphasizes proven rehabilitation initiatives and will reduce the prison population statewide.
     + Funding of SUNY hospitals was another PEF priority. SUNY hospitals have high Medicaid utilization and are heavily relied on by marginalized communities.
     + Securing hazard pay for essential workers including a bonus for healthcare workers was another PEF priority.
     + A loan repayment program for nurses was another PEF priority.
     + Generally, a priority for PEF was “keeping the social safety net in place.” Mr. Lyons also characterized these budget negotiations as being the first in a while where PEF was on offense.
     + Reform of the design-build program which allows sole contractors to design, build, and inspect some capital project is another priority. The goal here is to give taxpayers some “on-site” representation on these projects.
     + PEF fought for $22 million to fund 200 psychiatric care beds throughout the state. $10.5 million was secured for 100 beds.
     + NYS Senate included the merger of OASES and OMH in their budget proposal.
   * Pension Reform: The focus of pension reform is on Tiers 5 and 6. Tier 6 has a banded contribution rate to the NYS Pension fund that ranges from 3-6.5% and is dependent upon the employee salary. One goal is to standardize the 3% contribution rate throughout Tier 6 and to revise 20th year calculations (35% for Tier 6, 40% for Tier 4). Reform was focused on reducing the vesting period from ten years down to five; importantly, overtime is being shielded from this. The average age of NYS employees is 37. Danielle stated that PEF had received over 8,000 letters from members regarding this. Another goal of pension reform was to get the final average salary reduced from the final five years of an employees salary down to the final three. PEF wasn’t able to get everything it negotiated for but did secure bonuses for nurses and healthcare professionals ($1,500 going back 12 months and $1,500 over the next 12 months). Mr. Lyons stated that PEF will continue to fight for hazard pay. Agency budgets increased by 3.1%.
     + Mario Chiarello asked why CSEA wasn’t in on the hazard pay negotiations. Mr. Lyons indicated that they didn’t get involved until after the governor had submitted the initial budget.
     + Myron Getman asked if there is anything beyond a handshake deal regarding overtime. Mr. Lyons stated that it is in statute and includes specific titles; otherwise agency commissioners have discretion.
     + Greg asked if PEF was able to get the pension contribution reform included in the budget negotiation. No, but PEF was sure to get overtime shielded from contributions.
     + Retirees have an earnings cap of $35,000 before they incur pension penalties (there is a waiver for working at public schools and in some law enforcement capacities).
   * Some brief discussion regarding Kendra’s Law and overall facility closure within OMH and OPWDD.
   * PEF is opposed to the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact. This initiative allows nurses licensed in other states to practice in New York. This initiative was ultimately rejected, as was an initiative to shift licensure oversight for healthcare professions from Department of Education to Department of Health.
   * PEF supported the 988 Suicide Mental Health Hotline and making it a public health entity under OMH. The hotline was ratified but will be operated by private entities.
   * The proposal to consolidate OASES and OMH was rejected.
   * Three Civil Service changes were proposed within the budget. PEF opposed them all, and all three were rejected.
   * The student loan forgiveness provision was approved. Student loan forgiveness will be exempted as income for tax purposes.
   * The proposal to have independent inspectors for Design-Build projects was rejected.
   * PEF opposed an initiative to shift administrative responsibility for school lunches from DOE to DAM. This initiative was rejected.
   * $2 million was appropriated for the Office of Information Technology.
   * Mr. Lyons contrasted the Cuomo and Hochul administrations and their responses to negotiations with PEF. Ms. Hochul has been much more receptive to PEF priorities, even if the union didn’t get everything it was fighting for. Bottom line: grassroots & member support (ex. letters) works.
   * Michael Blue asked for clarification regarding the 200 beds vs. 100 beds secured for statewide psychiatric care. PEF fought for $22 million for 200 beds and $10.5 million was appropriated for 100 beds.
   * Michael Blue also asked what agencies had been exempted from Design-Build. Mr. Lyons indicated that he wasn’t sure but would get back to the group.
   * Sharon De Silva asked specifically how the $2 million appropriation for the OIT was worded. Was it designated as being specifically for training or was it just general language? Mr. Lyons read the language from the line item to the group. Ms. De Silva indicated that they are looking for more than just certification training; does the language need to be revised?
   * Catherine DellAngelo asked if there is a timeline for covid overtime rebates? Mr. Lyons clarified that it is not technically a rebate, but a two-year “look-back” going back to March 31, 2020.
   * Prakash Lal stated that OIT training has been an ask for over five years and that more certification training is needed for staff.
   * Mickey Dobbin asked about the school lunch initiative. Is there a plan moving forward? Mr. Lyons stated that there are multiple levels of “dead” in the NYS legislature; this bill is not “all the way dead.”
   * Mickey Dobbin asked how the suspension of the gas tax will impact state budgets? Mr. Lyons stated that he is not sure if NYS agencies pay gas taxes. Chris O’Neill stated that State Superfund program is funded through the gas tax ($.07/barrel).
   * Catherine DellAngelo asked where the requests for training ($2 million appropriation) go Mr. Lyons clarified that this is only applicable for OIT staff per request of CIO.
   * Catherine DellAngelo asked why the retiree income cap exemption was given just for public schools. Mr. Lyons stated that it is limited to district employees; original proposal was for certified teachers only and this was part of a negotiation.
   * Chris O’Neill stated that there was a financial disclosure at grade 24 top of grade or greater. PEF had requested a blanket exemption; what is the status of this? Mr. Lyons stated that he wasn’t sure but would get back to the group, also indicating that there have been JCOPE reforms recently. Chris stated that the biggest thing of the new law is that only CSEA is specifically referenced.
   * Member asked about privatization of the NYS parole system. Unknown what the status of this is.
   * Member asked if the 211 waiver is still in place for retirees? Catherine DellAngelo stated that the waiver technically has to go through review by Governors’ office. Only law enforcement seem to get approved.
   * Michael Blue asked if Governor Hochul is retaining the same level control as former Governor Cuomo over Civil Service. Mr. Lyons stated that the level of access with the Governors’ office has been unprecedented; there has been open communication on every issue.
   * Mario Chiarello asked about the COLA bill; are there any updates from NYS Pensions? Mr. Lyons stated that he hasn’t heard anything definitive but he has been in touch with Assemblyman Abate’s office and it is unlikely to get done this year.
   * Sharon De Silva asked if there was any update regarding JCOPE restructuring? Mr. Lyons stated that there was no update at this time.
   * Mickey Dobbin asked about the dual employment/ethics waiver issue with SED. Mr. Lyons stated that he was unaware of this issue but will catch up with it.
   * Margaret Ann stated that the balancing of agency staffing appears to represent a sea change and a departure from past administrations starving the state work force.
   * Michael Blue indicated that proposed changes to JCOPE are insignificant and there is little overall change to organizational structure.
   * Danielle indicated that PEF is the only union that has not yet endorsed Governor Hochul in the Democratic Primary for Governor. Danielle asked PAC members to poll other PEF members to see how they’re feeling.
   * Michael Blue recommended endorsing Gov. Hochul.
   * Margaret Ann asked about the timing of the endorsement (Democratic Primary is scheduled for June).
   * Mario Chiarello asked if there was a discussion about endorsements at PEF E-Board. Danielle indicated that E-Board had not discussed it.
   * Keith Jones stated that the Democratic Primary is not over, especially given the recent scandal with the Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin having damaged Gov. Hochul politically.
5. **PAC PAL DISCUSSION**
   * Danielle Bridger stated that PAC PALs will be assigned over the next two meetings. Asked that retirees defer to active members for PAC PAL openings. Mario Chiarello disagreed with this, stating that retirees had been filling positions that would otherwise have remained vacant.
   * Candidate interviews are currently being scheduled – Martin Robinson is working on this.
6. **PAC CREDENTIALED MEMBERS**
   * Issue of credentialed members participating only sporadically in PAC meetings was discussed at length. Per the 2007 rules, members who miss three consecutive meetings are contacted by the PAC via snail mail indicating that they would be removed from the committee. (Myron Getman read from the 2007 rules re: attendance and membership). The issue is that this policy/rule was never actually enforced.
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8. **LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST**

* Legislative Breakfast will be on May 4th @ The Albany Room from 7:30 AM – 9:00 PM.

1. **QUESTIONS**
   * General questions and answers are captured throughout the other agenda items in these minutes.
2. **ADJOURN**
   * Danielle Bridger made a motion to adjourn meeting. Myron Getman seconded motion and the meeting was adjourned around 8:20.