OCT. 2025 (#1)

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

WESTERN MA AREA LABOR FEDERATION
640 Page Blvd, Springfield, MA
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MOUNT HOLYOKE WORKERS ON STRIKE!

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE WORKERS ON STRIKE

This month, nearly 200 workers at Mount Holyoke College went on strike, leading to a successful conclusion to their contract campaign. Dining hall, facilities, and housekeeping workers from SEIU 32BJ and UAW 2322 (an ALF affiliate) walked the picket lines, demanding a mix of better wages and protection from the anti-worker and anti-immigrant policies of the federal government.

The new contract for 32BJ includes a **fully employer-funded legal defense fund** which will connect members with attorneys and pay for their legal fees. This groundbreaking provision is particularly important for immigrant workers, who can use the fund of immigration fees to defend against attacks by the federal administration on immigrant workers. The contract also includes up to nine months of unpaid time off for workers to deal with visas and other immigration concerns.

The contact also won meaningful wage increases, especially for the lowest-paid workers, bringing all employees closer to a living wage. The lowest-paid workers saw wage increases of about $3/hour, bringing the lowest point in the pay-scale above $20/hour for the first time. UAW workers won important concessions, including improvements on the wage scale for workers with many years of service, and a free weekly meal for workers, though their contract is still in the ratification process.

At its peak, over 350+ community members joined workers on the picket line, many of whom were Mt. Holyoke students and faculty, in addition to members of other unions. At the college commencement ceremony happening the same day, students overwhelmingly chanted “Pay Your Workers,” demanding concessions from the college leadership.

In this newsletter you can expect:

October Meeting

Mon. October 20th
6:30 PM - WMALF Offices, 640 Page Blvd, Springfield
Pizza provided.

LABOR DAY 2025 - WMALF IN HOLYOKE

On Labor Day, the Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation, its affiliate unions, and community groups marched in Holyoke in solidarity with the Holyoke Teachers Association. The HTA is fighting for a fair contract as the city's school district moves out of receivership.

The march began with a rally at city hall, with speakers from different unions and community organizations.

Addressing the crowd of hundreds of union members and supporters from the wider community, HTA Vice-President Alex Cespedes demanded state interference in Holyoke end: "The workers, students, and families of Holyoke deserve the right to self-determination in how we run our schools."

They further called on the Holyoke School Committee to bargain in good faith on a contract that includes:

- Fair compensation that addresses inequalities created during receivership
- "A culture of respect, shared decision-making, and educator autonomy"
- A "modern and humane" parental leave policy

Cespedes thanked other unions and community groups for joining the march in solidarity, calling for us to join with them in the "fight for democracy in all of our schools and workplaces."

Speaking at the rally, PVWA President and SEIU 509 member Ethel Everett described the situation facing workers serving the public: "Teachers, social workers, caregivers, and countless others are placed in a moral dilemma. Serve because it's your passion, even when the system fails you." She concluded, "We demand good contracts, safe working conditions, fair wages and respect."

Speaking to the press, UAW 2322 President Patrick Burke spoke to the challenges facing working people under the current administration, saying "This is a hard time for a lot of working people. We want to make sure that the issues of living wages, a voice on the job, and democracy more generally are really being heard."

Mon, October 20th

October WMALF Delegates Meeting

Join us for our upcoming food drive and help make a difference in our community. Let's work together to fight hunger and provide support to those in need. Here are the details:

- Date: Monday, October 20th
- Time: 6:30 PM
- Location: 640 Page Blvd, Springfield, MA
- All working people are welcome, but only delegates of ALF affiliates can vote
- RSVP:

WANT TO BUILD A UNION IN YOUR WORKPLACE? CONTACT THE ALF TODAY

Email us with information about your workplace: organizer@wmalf.org

Western Mass Area Labor Federation

INSIDE ORGANIZER SCHOOL COMES TO WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

By Clare Hammonds, MSP Member and Professor of Practice at the UMASS Labor Center

In September, the WMALF and the UMass Labor Center co-hosted the first Inside Organizer School (IOS) in Massachusetts. The three-day intensive organizer training brought together nearly 40 participants from Western Mass and around the New England region. Some participants were already unionized and were looking to deepen their internal organizing skills, while others were looking to step into the role of a, “salt” and help to lead new organizing campaigns from the inside.

The IOS has trained over 500 inside organizers or “salts” around the country who have played key roles in some of the most exciting campaigns of the last decade. Over the course of the weekend, participants at the Western Mass IOS learned directly from organizers of the first Buffalo Starbucks drive. They left with concrete skills to organize like research, one-on-one conversations, workplace mapping and building committees as well as the tools needed to challenge employer opposition.

Local unions were at the heart of the program. UFCW 1459 and UAW 2322, both WMALF affiliates, presented case studies from their recent organizing fights, grounding the curriculum in the lived realities of workers here in our region.

Film was another powerful element of the weekend. On Friday night, participants gathered for the Massachusetts premiere of Partners: How Starbucks Baristas Started a Labor Revolution. The film’s director Chris Session was present after the film for a discussion that also included some of the original organizers from the Starbucks in Buffalo. On Sunday, Sessions also previewed his upcoming film on the Hyatt organizing drive in Buffalo and participants were asked to link the film to the lessons of the weekend.

The weekend was a tremendous success and the WMALF is already planning the next IOS session for April 2026. Please contact Sasha Morsmith at organizer@wmalf.org if you would like to receive information about the next training.

SEPTEMBER HAMPSHIRE-FRANKLIN LABOR AND WORKERS ASSEMBLY BRINGS UNION WORKERS TOGETHER

On September 30th, over twenty union workers, staff, and community organizers met at Drawing Board Brewery in Florence, MA for the September meeting of the Hampshire-Franklin Labor and Workers Assembly. Our labor assembly meetings are a space for affiliate members, workers from other unions or unorganized workplaces, and members of community organizing to meet together to discuss our shared issues and goals.

Leaders from the Northampton Firefighters, IAFF Local 108, shared news from their recent contract campaign, which won higher staffing levels to address overwork in the department. Meanwhile, representatives from the Massachusetts Nurses Association shared updates about the Cooley Dickinson Strike Authorization.

Cooley Dickinson management has responded to the planned strike authorization with the threat of a five-day lockout of Nurses, should they authorize a one-day strike.

Members and representatives from UFCW 1459, MTA-NASE, IBEW Locals 7 & 455, and IATSE 232 were also present. Volunteers from Springfield No One Leaves (SNOL) shared updates about signature gathering for the 2026 Rent Control Ballot Measure, which would cap rent increases at 5%.

The next meeting of the Hampshire-Franklin Assembly will be on Tuesday, November 18th at a location to be determined. The Pioneer Valley Workers Assembly (based in Hampden County) meets on Wednesday, October 29th at the WMALF Offices in Springfield.

FAIRNESS FOR FARMWORKERS COALITION CONTINUES FIGHT AGAINST DOUBLE-STANDARDS FOR FARMWORKERS

Since 2020, the Fairness for Farmworkers Coalition has been fighting against the two-tier minimum wage in Massachusetts for farmworkers. Currently, farm laborers can be paid as little as $8/hour and have no right to overtime pay, which is particularly egregious in an industry where working 55+ hours per week is common.

The Fairness for Farmworkers Act would eliminate the two-tier wage system, and require paid time off and overtime for farm workers. Farmworkers would also be entitled to two 15 minute breaks before and after lunch to help fight heat exhaustion on the job.

While the Act has been introduced in the legislature each year since 2020, it has never made it out of committee. This year, the Coalition is trying a new strategy - splitting the bill so that the minimum wage, paid breaks, and time off fall under one piece of legislation; while overtime and tax credits to offset overtime costs are place in another.

Coalition members Claudia Quintero and Maya McCann, of Central West Justice Center, shared that this tactic was intended to address hold-ups in the legislation over the tax credit proposal, which is intended to help alleviate financial burden on farmers.

Two Minimum Wages on One Job-site

Under current Massachusetts law, workers at farms can be subject to two different minimum wages depending on what task they're doing. Field-work is subject to a sub-minimum wage of just $8/hour, while "secondary" work, such as cleaning and processing produce, is subject to the $15/hour minimum wage. In agriculture, the hardest work being paid the least isn't just a common practice - its enshrined in state law.

Quintero and McCann shared the absurdity of this legal situation: a worker could spend 40 hours working in the field and 35 hours working in production for the same employer, on the same job-site, and not be entitled to a cent of overtime pay.

The Fairness for Farmworkers Act would address this injustice, whose roots go back to the signing of the National Labor Relations Act, which excluded farmworkers from the legal right to form a union.

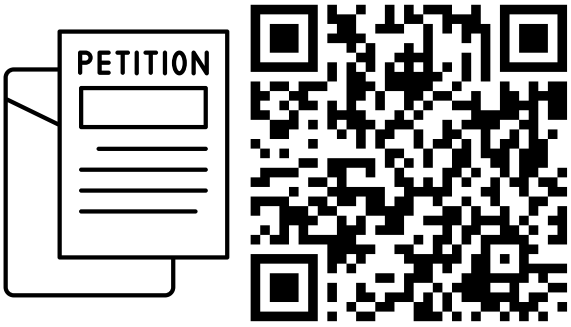
Farmworkers and Organized Labor

While farmworkers are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, the State of Massachusetts does recognize the right of farmworkers to form a union and collectively bargain. However, due to the extremely repressive conditions which are common in the industry, and widespread fears of ICE raids, no agricultural unions have formed in Massachusetts.

Our region contains three of the leading counties for agricultural production in Massachusetts: Franklin, Hampshire, and Berkshire counties. Thousands of workers are employed in agriculture across Western Massachusetts, representing an unorganized sector that could use the support of organized labor.

Union Endorsements

The Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation is a member of the FFC Steering Committee, and the coalition has also been endorsed by ALF affiliate UFCW Local 1459. The Fairness for Farmworker Act has also been endorsed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association. *If you are a member or a leader of a union and would like to endorse the FFA, contact organizer@wmalf.org.*



PROVIDE TESTIMONY: TWO BILLS SUPPORTED BY MTA ARE IN LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS THIS MONTH

BY WILLEM GOFF, WMALF INTERN AND UMASS LABOR CENTER GRADUATE STUDENT

H.733 | S.370 An Act relative to educator pay

Hearing Date: Tuesday October 14, 11am-4pm, Massachusetts State House, Gardner Auditorium, 24 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02108
Deadline to provide spoken testimony (in-person or remote): October 12 at 5:00 PM, email mlabonte@massteacher.org
Lead Sponsors: Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven (D-Somerville) & Rep. Tara Hong (D-Lowell) | Sen. Adam Gomez (D-Springfield)

This bill would institute a minimum salary of $55,000 for all Education Support Professionals (also known as paraeducators and teachers aids) and $70,000 for all teachers over the next ten years, with future rate increases included. The bill would also create a reimbursement program to assist school districts with the rising costs of the salary increases.

Long time Special Education Teacher and Great Barrington Teachers Vice President Kelsey Romano described the importance of this bill: "Right now, schools across the state are struggling to find and keep dedicated teachers and paraprofessionals because their pay simply doesn't reflect the vital work they do. This crisis hurts our students the most, especially students with special needs and multilingual learners who rely on paraprofessionals for the extra support they need to succeed... By investing in fair, livable wages, we are not just recognizing their worth; we are sending a powerful message that we value education, equity, and the futures of all our children."

Romano's comments were echoed by Sue Sullivan, an ELL Teacher and member of MTA-NASE: "...educator pay needs to stay competitive in Massachusetts if we want to retain teachers who are already dwindling in numbers in our State... We need to draw workers to the field of education as a career that will attract and support them financially in these uncertain and challenging times."

H.691 | S.430 An Act relative to the long-term fiscal health and sustainability of special education in the Commonwealth

Hearing Date: Tuesday November 18, 1-5pm, Massachusetts State House, Gardner Auditorium, 24 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02108
Deadline to provide spoken testimony (in-person or remote): November 15 at 5:00 PM, email mlabonte@massteacher.org
Lead Sponsors: Rep. Adam Scanlon (D-North Attleboro) & Rep. Mike Kushmerek (D-Fitchburg) | Sen. Jake Oliveira (D-Ludlow)

This bill, through establishing a special commission, would work toward increasing the reimbursement of the Special Education Circuit Breaker costs to 90% and creating an equitable funding structure for schools based on special education funding needs (e.g. districts with more students receiving special education services would receive more state funding than districts with less students receiving special education services).

Romano stated, "Increasing the reimbursement rate from 75% to 90% will have a direct and meaningful impact on school districts, especially in rural and under-resourced areas... Lowering the cost threshold for eligibility will also help ensure that more services (such as specialized instruction, assistive technology, and paraprofessional support) can be offered without forcing districts to make impossible budgetary trade-offs."

Sullivan wrote "[The reimbursement rate for the Circuit Breaker program] desperately needs to be increased to keep up with rising costs of out-of-district private education for special needs students."

Written testimony can also be provided online using the QR code below.

WRITE FOR THE NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is for all the affiliates and members of the ALF. If you have news or ideas to share about your local, the area labor movement, or the problems facing the working class, *write about them and spread the word.* Submissions are due **the third Friday of each month** and should be 200-600 words.

QUESTIONS? EMAIL US!
ORGANIZER@WMALF.ORG

MNA NURSES AT COOLEY DICKINSON TO TAKE STRIKE AUTHORIZATION VOTE ON OCTOBER 9TH

FROM THE MNA WEBSITE

NORTHAMPTON, Mass. – The registered nurses of Cooley Dickinson Hospital, represented by the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), have announced they will hold a one-day strike authorization vote on Thursday, October 9. The vote comes as nurses confront unsafe staffing conditions, uncompetitive wages, and potential hikes to health insurance costs, while Cooley's owner, Mass General Brigham (MGB), continues to make enormous profits and pays its executives millions in annual compensation.

Strike Authorization Vote Details

- Date: Thursday, October 9, 2025
- Time: 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- More Details: Contact Joe Markman, MNA Associate Director of Communications, 781-571-8175, jmarkman@mnarn.org

The scheduled vote follows a high-turnout informational picket Cooley nurses held in June. A yes vote by Cooley nurses would not necessarily mean nurses will strike but would give their elected bargaining committee the authority to hold a one-day strike following the issuance of a legally required 10-day notice.

"MGB is the wealthiest hospital system in New England, and yet is refusing to provide the resources Cooley nurses and patients need," said Rosie Tottser, Cooley Dickinson RN and MNA Committee Co-Chair. "We are seeking enforceable staffing protections, competitive pay, and affordable health insurance to protect our patients, retain nurses, and sustain our hospital."

"Our strike authorization vote will show MGB that Cooley nurses are truly united," said Aaron Winston, Cooley Dickinson RN and MNA Committee Co-Chair. "If MGB can pay its CEO more than $8 million in a single year, it can invest in Cooley nurses and our patients. We will demonstrate loud and clear that our community hospital deserves much better than what MGB is proposing."

What Cooley Nurses Are Seeking

- **Safe Staffing**: Enforceable staffing grids to address nurse burnout, turnover, and patient safety. MGB refuses to agree to these protections and has failed to address the emergency department staffing crisis, even while expanding the Cooley ED.
- **Competitive Wages**: Cooley nurses make up to $15/hour less than peers at UMass Memorial for the same experience, and far less than nurses at other MGB hospitals who recently won raises. This wage gap fuels turnover and threatens safe patient care.
- **Affordable Health Insurance**: MGB wants to replace Cooley nurses' current insurance plans with three MGB plans that come with higher out-of-pocket costs and potential severe future increases in premium costs. Under management's proposal, premium costs could skyrocket because they would be tied to non-union costs without any contractual protection. MGB also wants to redefine full-time from 30 to 36 hours, which would negatively impact many nurses. Nurses are fighting for enforceable protections for premium splits and 30-hour full-time eligibility.

MGB Financial Background

- MGB CEO Anne Klibanski made $8.4M in FY2023 (the latest year available) – a 40% raise in one year – including $4.3 million in bonuses, according to the Boston Globe.
- From 2018 to 2023, MGB executives and key employees made $819 million in total salary. They made a combined $100 million in bonuses, according to MGB filings.
- Cooley Dickinson alone reported $9.7 million in profit in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024 according to the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA).
- According to the Boston Globe, "the MGB system found itself $2 billion richer in the year ending in September [2024], almost doubling the $1.2 billion net margin the system reported the year prior."
- MGB is spending $2 billion expanding Massachusetts General Hospital and Faulkner Hospital while proposing cuts for frontline caregivers in Western Massachusetts.

NEED TO UPDATE YOUR DELEGATION TO THE WMALF

Save the paperwork, have your leadership fill out the form online today! Just use the QR code to the right.

LETTER FROM THE NEW WMALF ORGANIZER

Greetings,

My name is Sasha Morsmith and I'm the new organizer for the Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation. I am excited to begin working with everyone here in the ALF, from rank & file members to our delegates and e-board.

I first became involved in the labor movement in 2018, when I joined UE Local 203 while working at a grocery store in Burlington, Vermont. In 2020, during the early days of the COVID Pandemic, I took on the role of interim President in my local, and served as Chief Steward the following year. While in leadership, my local fought for and won millions of dollars in hazard pay for our 250+ worker bargaining unit.

Since moving to Western Massachusetts in 2022, I have worked in a few different industries: agricultural trucking, education, and construction logistics. While working as a paraeducator in Northampton Public Schools, I was a proud member of MTA-NASE.

In this role, I want to find ways for the ALF to provide meaningful support to locals across all industries and all four counties of our federation. If you have a campaign or action that needs solidarity from the community or other locals, we will make that happen. If your local needs education programs set up, reach out.

I will be working full time out of the ALF offices in Springfield, typically from 8:30-4:30 M-F. We also have an intern for the year, Willem Goff of the UMASS Labor Center Grad Program, who will be working ten hours per week out of our Springfield offices.

If you'd like to set up a meeting, please reach out to me at organizer@wmalf.org.

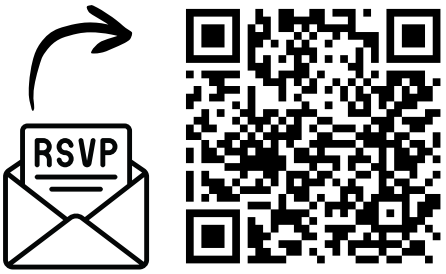
In solidarity, Sasha Morsmith

Fri, October 15th

Messaging On Solidarity: Tools for Talking about Immigration

This training is designed to give leaders and activists in the AFL-CIO tips and tools to talk to the media and others effectively about immigration.

- Date: Friday, October 15th
- Time: 3:00 - 4:00 PM
- Location: **Virtual Meeting**



Wed, October 29th

October Pioneer Valley Workers Assembly Meeting

The regular meeting of the Western MA Area Labor Federation for workers who live or are employed in Hampden County. Open to all members of the working class and their families. Meetings are meant to build the solidarity and strength of the working class, and our ability to win better wages and working conditions. Whether or not you are union member - you are welcome!

- Date: Wednesday, October 29th
- Time: 5:30 - 8:00 PM
- Location: WMALF Offices, 640 Page Blvd, Springfield, MA
- RSVP: bit.ly/WMALFPVWA

HOW TO DEFEND MEMBERS FROM POLITICIZED FIRINGS

September 18th, 2025 by Bill Barry in *Labor Notes* (Abridged, full article on labornotes.org)

Can a worker be fired simply for expressing an opinion that the boss or a political group finds objectionable? These days online attackers often campaign to pressure employers to fire workers for political speech—even speech that took place on their private social media pages. Stewards have a number of tools at their disposal to defend members from these attacks.

Bosses and disgruntled co-workers have long attempted to target workers over off-duty conduct. Grievance books are filled with examples of disputes away from the workplace—for example, a boss and a worker both have too much to drink and get into a dispute at a local watering hole, and the boss demands that the worker be fired "in the interest of workplace safety."

Such firings are rarely upheld by arbitrators: if a worker can get to work and carry out normal work functions, a situation away from the job is typically considered wholly separate.

Today's firings present a new challenge for union stewards because each case becomes public, playing out on social media and on the national stage. Nonetheless, the same principles hold. Here are some basic steps a steward should take to investigate a possible grievance:

Check the Facts

If determining the facts of a situation at work is often difficult, then figuring out the details of an off-duty episode is even dicier. A steward may have to leave work to try to interview witnesses, if any can be found, or may be able to access public records—like police reports—to gather information. Unfortunately, laws that could require witnesses to testify don't apply to grievance procedures, so a steward has to be especially resourceful..

When it comes to social media doxxing campaigns, the "facts" are clearly posted: workers' personal opinions on social media are typically screenshotted and shared, perhaps more widely than the worker had intended.

Right away, the steward should raise the question of how the episode is related to the workplace. Make the boss prove that the off-duty situation somehow has relevance to the workplace.

Finally, the steward should ask: does the punishment fit the crime? Even if there is evidence that the worker did something wrong, does this affect anything or anyone in the workplace?

Don't Bow to Public Pressure

A grievance like this will become a public spectacle, urged on by culture war crusaders who want to control all expressions of opinion they disagree with. They may bring the matter to a non-grievance venue, like a public school board meeting or local council.

So the union, too, should take the opportunity to organize around the grievance. In many unions, grievances are filed by officers who meet privately with the boss and then send it to arbitration. A better way is to get members involved by creating a group grievance—everyone signs on and offers to testify at a grievance meeting.

In instances of political retaliation, workers like teachers and journalists may be moved to rally in defense of free speech—culture warriors are creating a movement to suppress our opinions, and we have to develop our own movement to protect our members.

When a contentious political issue is at stake, union members will land on different sides. Some may be sympathetic to the attackers. You have to explain to these members that defending the right of someone to express an opinion will protect every member—even them. Put the issue forward as a matter of free speech, not a defense of a particular opinion.

Ultimately, the "just cause" section of the union contract offers protection for all workers. It's important for a steward to stress this point to other union members who may be inclined—due to the nature of the off-duty episode—to let the boss get rid of a co-worker without making a convincing case. Enforcing the contract for one is enforcing the contract for all!

Bill Barry is a retired organizer and the author of "From First Contact to First Contract: a Union Organizers Handbook."