

Communications Workers of America

CWA National Committee on
Civil Rights and Equity
Report

Presidents' Meeting
June 2018

CWA National Committee on Civil Rights and Equity

District 1
Gloria Middleton, President
CWA Local 1180

District 2-13
Vera Mikell, President
CWA Local 2205

District 3
Andrell Hubbard, Vice President
CWA Local 3902

District 4
Diane Bailey, President
National CRE Committee Chair
CWA Local 4310

District 6
Gerald Murray, President
CWA Local 6507

District 7
Fernando Roman, Jr., Exec V.P.
CWA Local 7026

District 9
Kirk Moore, Nevada Assn. of Public Safety
Officers
CWA Local 9110

District 9
Domonique Thomas, President
CWA Local 9510

AFA-CWA
Robert Barrow, President
AFA-CWA Local 26052

IUE-CWA
Evelyn Evans, Grievance Co-Chair
IUE-CWA Local 81381

TNG-CWA
Dorethea Brown-Maxey, President
NABET-CWA Local 54043

Public Sector
Kendall Bell, President
CWA Local 81381

Introduction

The labor and civil rights movements are inextricably linked in the fight to improve the lives of our members, working families and the broader community. As one of the leading international unions, CWA has played a central role in those movements from the start. We know that when we connect with civil and human rights groups—and with our communities—on the issues that affect us all, we grow stronger together. As you can see in the report below, our collective efforts have made a difference in everything from fighting for fair wages and voting rights to helping immigrants and victims of human trafficking, particularly women of color and LGBTQ people.

One way we've pulled all these issues together is through CWA Strong. It's our vehicle to combine member mobilization, participation and activism to fight for the vital issues mentioned above, and to advance our core work of protecting jobs and improving wages, benefits and a secure retirement. It's how we promote economic justice for all. Now is the time for an "all hands on deck" movement. By working together and being CWA Strong, we can build on our successes and move into the future stronger than ever.

WE ARE CWA STRONG!

DACA and Protecting Dreamers: Fighting for Justice for Young Immigrant Workers

When President Obama authorized the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, in 2012, it marked a huge step toward fairness for immigrants who were brought to the United States as children and have known only this country as home. More than 800,000 young women and men, Dreamers, have benefited from DACA. These immigrants have strengthened our local communities and economies, contributing billions in state and local taxes and working in every occupation from teachers and organizers to lawyers and entertainers. Today there are 900 Dreamers serving in our armed forces. Dreamers contribute to every facet of American life. They are also hardworking, dues-paying members of the CWA and many other unions.

Despite promising that he would treat Dreamers with “great heart,” President Trump has moved to eliminate the DACA program, upending countless lives and threatening to send these young people back into the shadows. The program’s future is uncertain, with countless lawsuits challenging the administration’s actions. Many of those lawsuits have been successful, so at this point, the Department of Homeland Security is still accepting DACA renewal applications. The only real permanent fix, however, is for Congress to pass the Dream Act and broader immigration reform legislation.

In order to apply for DACA, immigrants must have been younger than 31 on June 15, 2012, must have come to the United States before turning 16, and must have lived here since June 15, 2007. Applicants are vetted for any criminal history or national security concerns, and are required to be students or have completed school or military service. If they pass vetting, action to deport them is deferred for two years, with a chance to renew, and they become eligible for a driver’s license, college enrollment and a work permit.

We live in a country that should live up to the ideal of welcoming the world’s “tired, ... poor, [and] ... huddled masses.” But this principle has been undermined by President Trump, his allies in Congress, and many state and local politicians, along with xenophobes and nationalists who spew fear and hate. They would like to see Dreamers deported to countries they’ve never lived in and where they might not even speak the native language.

CWA will continue to work with our progressive partners at the national level to end the political gridlock in Congress and push for comprehensive solutions to our broken immigration system—a system that currently benefits the 1 percent on the backs of some of the most vulnerable workers. The public supports that, as does a bipartisan group of members of Congress. Those solutions start by providing pathways to citizenship for millions of students, families, and neighbors working and living alongside us who are at risk of being deported. Congress needs to pass a clean Dream Act—one that protects Dreamers but not in conjunction with border walls, immigration raids, or other policies that separate families and create fear and uncertainty.

At the local level, CWAers will continue to build relationships and work closely with organizations such as Mijente, Puente, Casa de Maryland, Casa de Virginia, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, United We Dream worker centers and other grassroots community groups organizing resistance.

History has shown us that through mass movements and connecting on our common struggles, working-class people can direct change. As a union family, CWA will continue the fight for our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Missing, Exploited and Trafficked: The Underreporting of Missing Women of Color

Slavery might be officially illegal in the United States, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It does, in the form of human trafficking and exploitation, which is a multibillion-dollar criminal industry that strips its victims of their freedom and basic human dignity. We're talking about victims like the runaway girl forced into prostitution, the domestic worker who is abused and not allowed to leave the house, or the immigrant washing dishes in a restaurant kitchen whose boss has taken his passport.

There is no official estimate of the total number of human trafficking victims in the United States. Polaris, a leader in the global fight to eradicate modern slavery, says the number of victims nationally reaches into the hundreds of thousands when you combine both adults and minors, sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

The victims of sex trafficking can be U.S. citizens, immigrants, women, men, children and LGBTQ individuals. Vulnerable populations frequently targeted by traffickers include runaway and homeless youth, as well as victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war or discrimination. In 2016, for example, an estimated 1 out of 6 endangered runaways who were reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims, Polaris says.

Labor traffickers—including recruiters, contractors and employers—use violence, threats, lies, debt bondage or other forms of coercion to force people to work against their will. Many of the same groups vulnerable to sex trafficking are taken advantage of by labor traffickers.

Immigration status, recruitment debt, isolation, poverty and a lack of strong labor protections are among the factors that can lead to labor trafficking. In the United States, common types of labor trafficking include people forced to work in homes as domestic servants, farmworkers

coerced through violence as they harvest crops, and factory workers held in inhumane conditions.

Clearly, human trafficking and exploitation in any form is an issue that must be of concern to labor, civil rights and human rights groups.

The majority of human trafficking victims are girls and young women, and even more so, African-American women or other women of color. According to Rights4Girls, a leading advocacy organization working to improve the lives of marginalized girls, girls of color are not only disproportionately victims of human trafficking, but also make up the majority of people who end up in the criminal justice system as a result of their exploitation.

Despite the fact that black women and girls are disproportionately among the missing, the victimized and even the murdered, you wouldn't know that from news coverage. Contrast this with what's often wall-to-wall coverage of missing white girls. As of 2014, 64,000 black women were missing across the U.S.—again, a highly disproportionate figure compared with the total number missing—but it's a story that's rarely told on the news.

The first few moments after a person is determined missing are vital to search and recovery efforts. Getting information to the public can be the determining factor in whether someone is ultimately found. Media coverage, social media and missing persons forums contribute greatly to providing the public with information about missing persons. Unfortunately, this effort is often overlooked or disregarded when people of color disappear. Statistics show that although African-Americans make up just 13 percent of the U.S. population, they account for nearly 40 percent of missing people in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's database, and only about 23 percent of these cases receive media coverage.

Realizing the need to reduce this disparity and close the gap in the disproportionate amount of negative coverage blacks receive, the Black and Missing Foundation, Inc. (BAMFI) was

established to take the issue head-on. BAMFI works to ensure that missing black women and children receive the media coverage needed to aid in their discovery. Through media coverage, and by providing a forum to inform the public of missing individuals, BAMFI has successfully located more than 200 missing people since 2008.

Many of CWA's members are on the frontlines of work to end trafficking and exploitation, and CWA members help prevent circumstances under which people go missing, and they assist in recovering missing persons. In particular, members of Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA) and CWA's public social services workers are combating these issues.

AFA-CWA launched an anti-trafficking campaign that utilized flight attendants' unique position, as trained and skilled observers of passengers, to serve as a frontline against trafficking when they see something suspicious. Flight attendants can participate in "Blue Lightning," which provides a voluntary way to identify trafficking victims and notify federal authorities. In 2018, AFA-CWA also took this discussion to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Through the activism of AFA-CWA, ICAO and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UHCHR) conducted a forum on the Circular created, with AFA-CWA's help, that provides world-wide guidelines on training cabin crew to recognize and report human trafficking.

Also on the frontline of this work are members of CWA's Public, Healthcare & Education Workers (PHEW) work in social service and law enforcement occupations that involve contact with children under age 18, including child protective services investigators. If exploitation, abuse or trafficking is suspected, these workers enforce protocol with law enforcement and ensure that victims receive necessary services.

The efforts of CWA's flight attendant, social service and law enforcement members are making a difference in the lives of those who have been taken from their loved ones and forced into human trafficking.

Still, there continues to be a wide gap regarding the investigation of cases involving missing black women and girls. Too many of these cases are falling through the cracks. The challenge is for CWA members to assist in filling these gaps by becoming involved with organizations that work on issues regarding missing persons, to ensure all cases are treated with the same dignity and respect. Everyone's loved one is special and important, no matter his or her economic status or race.

Is It Voter Fraud or an Excuse for Voter Suppression?

You might have heard this statistic before: It's more likely that a person will be struck by lightning than that he or she will impersonate another voter at the polls. As amazing as that sounds, it's absolutely true. Despite the rare occurrence of voter fraud, some political figures push the narrative that this is a widespread phenomenon. The Brennan Center for Justice, which has done the most comprehensive analysis of voter fraud, finds that the rate of fraud is somewhere between 0.0003 percent and 0.0025 percent. Nevertheless, President Trump—perhaps in search of enough fictitious votes to make up for his 3 million-vote deficit in the 2016 popular vote—has repeatedly and falsely claimed that voter fraud is widespread, especially voting by non-citizens.

In the real world of facts and evidence, however, what we do know is that voter suppression—not voter fraud—is a huge and growing problem. And those most affected are the poor, the elderly and students. As a whole, those groups are disproportionately people of color—and they tend to vote Democratic. Under the guise of making elections more secure against the phantom threat of fraud, many states have passed laws erecting significant barriers to one of our most fundamental rights.

One way they do this is through strict voter ID laws, which require voters to show a driver's license or other government ID in order to vote. While this might sound simple to many, they are not the ones who have to travel to government agencies (typically via public transportation), pay the cost of purchasing a new birth certificate (since many don't drive), and deal with the often complicated bureaucracy of getting the appropriate ID. One government study has suggested that the introduction of stricter ID requirements could cut 2-3 percentage points off the Democratic Party's vote total.

Rather than making voting easier through policies such as same-day registration and early voting, many states have done the opposite. States also have purged their voter rolls, which often ends up mistakenly disenfranchising those same groups of predominately black and brown Democratic voters. This is not an accident or coincidence.

One recent factor in the rise of voter suppression laws, which culminated with new laws being passed in states leading up to the 2016 elections and even after, was a damaging 2013 Supreme Court decision that gutted key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The law, passed during the height of the civil rights era, proved essential in helping prevent racial discrimination in voting, particularly in Southern states.

The scope of voter suppression laws extends far beyond the South, however, and the impact is equally far-reaching. In 13 states that have passed these laws, there has been no expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and more than 20 states with such laws have banned cities and counties from raising their minimum wage.

CWA will continue to fight these voter suppression efforts at every level and to push for initiatives at the state and national levels that make voting easier, such as expanded early voting and same-day registration. CWA is working closely with the Democracy Initiative, a broad and diverse coalition working to ensure all Americans can participate fully and freely in the democratic process. In addition, CWA remains deeply involved with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, including serving on its voting rights task force.

Corporate America's "Tax Reform" Law

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that President Trump signed in December is one of the most damaging pieces of legislation passed so far during his tenure. Not surprisingly, a quick review of the tax law illustrates just how little this administration cares about working people—and how much its policies are focused on benefiting corporations and the richest 1 percent.

The tax plan represents one of the biggest transfers of wealth to the rich our country has ever seen. The wealthiest 1 percent—who clearly aren't struggling economically—will receive 83 percent of the benefits from the law. Families in the middle class will share just 8 percent of the benefits. The law also helps lock in inequality for generations to come by raising the estate tax exemption to \$11 million.

Then there are the benefits to corporations, which are even more generous and long-lasting. Starting this year, the law slashes the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent. And get this: The corporate tax cuts are permanent, while the individual rate cuts and other changes that will benefit more middle-class families, such as increases in the standard deduction, expire at the end of 2025.

So far, there's little evidence that corporations are sharing their new windfalls with workers in the form of higher wages or by creating jobs. They are, however, boosting stock buybacks and increasing dividends, which only benefit their shareholders. Despite the tax cuts, many companies also continue to downsize and ship jobs overseas.

The law also preserves the carried interest loophole, which lets hedge fund and private equity billionaires pay a lower tax rate than their secretaries. And it creates a loophole on the income of "pass through" businesses that will also allow the wealthy to lower their taxes.

This corporate giveaway law was made even worse by tacking on a provision that repealed the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate to buy health insurance, which will increase the cost of health insurance for all and reduce access to affordable health care.

The tax plan will increase the federal budget deficit to nearly \$1 billion in fiscal year 2019, and Republicans are already using that skyrocketing deficit to target deep cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, student aid, food and housing assistance, and other programs the neediest Americans depend on. This tax law is simply a transfer of wealth to the richest Americans at the expense of working families and underserved communities. What we see again is billionaires first and everyone else last!

The tax law was passed by elected leaders in Washington, D.C., and it can be repealed or improved by them as well. CWA will continue to educate our members about its devastating effects. One way is through our economic justice training, including our Political Bootcamp and Reversing Runaway Inequality training. We will continue working with our constituency groups and our communities to ensure we all get out and vote for people who share our values, and then hold them accountable.

CWA has continuously been at the forefront of mobilizing and fighting back against these kinds of 1 percent-led corporate attacks on the working class. We must and will continue to stand up and fight back!

Gerrymandering: Voters Should Pick Their Politicians... Not the Other Way Around

Gerrymandering is a practice that attempts to give one political party an advantage—typically the majority party, because it has more control over the redistricting process—by manipulating the boundaries of election districts. It’s why we see oddly shaped districts. The origin of “gerrymander” came from the word “salamander,” which makes sense when you see the shapes of some districts that are sometimes barely wider than a road in some spots.

There are two main tactics politicians take in gerrymandering: “cracking,” which involves breaking up the voting power of one party’s supporters by spreading them across many districts, and “packing,” the opposite approach that concentrates supporters in one district so they have less power in other districts.

The typical result is to help incumbents. And while both parties have done their share of gerrymandering, a 2014 *Washington Post* analysis found that 8 of the 10 most gerrymandered districts in the country were redrawn by Republicans.

Given the incredible opposition to Donald Trump, the influx of new candidates (and women in particular) and the unpredictable current state of politics, it’s possible that things will be different during the 2018 midterm elections. But if form holds, very few incumbents will lose. In the 2016 elections for the House of Representatives, the average margin of victory was 37 percent. Only 17 seats out of 435 races were decided by a margin of 5 percent or less, and only 33 seats by 10 percent or less. In 42 of the 50 states, there was not a single competitive race for Congress.

One result of gerrymandering is the increase in partisan gridlock that seems to be the defining characteristic of Congress today. When representatives of either party win in districts with 80 percent of the vote, there is little reason for them to compromise. And today, more than ever, such bipartisan efforts can bring a primary challenge from the more extreme wings of the parties.

CWA has been leading redistricting efforts to make districts more democratic and representative, including in Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

Pennsylvania offers an interesting, and timely, example. In 2012, Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives received 83,000 more votes than Republican candidates. But Republicans won 13 of the state's 18 seats in Congress as the result of Republican-controlled districting. Earlier this year, the state Supreme Court ruled that the current map violated the state constitution and had to be redrawn. The new map, which is much more representative of the state's actual political makeup, could result in much more competitive races, with Democrats winning back Republican-held seats.

North Carolina, which by some accounts has the most gerrymandered districts in the country, is facing an ongoing court battle, including multiple federal court rulings that the districts must be revised. But delays have meant that new districts won't be redrawn for this Fall.

It is critical for our democracy that CWA continue to push for representative districting as well our other work on voting rights.

One Fair Wage Campaign

Imagine working 40 hours a week and earning just \$2.13 an hour before taxes, without benefits or health insurance. You have to rely on the generosity of the customers you serve to earn extra money to support yourself and your family. Or the alternative: You turn to public assistance to make ends meet. That is the grim reality for many workers in the restaurant industry, which employs 1 in 10 workers and includes 7 of the 10 lowest-paying jobs in the country.

Seventy percent of people who work in the restaurant industry are women, and large percentages also are people of color. A living base wage is not guaranteed, and these workers have to depend on tips. As a result, restaurant workers, especially women, frequently have to put up with sexual harassment from customers, co-workers and management. A survey of 688 restaurant workers by the Restaurant Opportunity Center showed that women working in states where they must depend on customers' tips for the bulk of their income are twice as likely to experience sexual harassment as workers in states that do not have a lower tipped minimum wage. The restaurant industry is the single largest source of sexual harassment charges filed by women with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—at a rate five times higher than any other industry.

Even tipped workers at large corporate chain restaurants make an average of just \$8 an hour, which includes tips. These full-time workers face three times the poverty rate as the rest of the workforce.

The lower wage for tipped workers is not designed to be a living wage, or even a minimum wage. Employers are legally required to “top off” the pay of employees who work for tips so their pay reaches at least the minimum wage. However, enforcement is so lax and disorganized that wage

theft has reached epidemic levels. And it's especially widespread with immigrant workers, who face additional stress and fear, depending on their legal status.

It should come as no surprise that the Trump administration, as just one part of its effort to strip workers' hard-won rights actually proposed that restaurant owners and managers be allowed to pocket the tips of their workers. An Obama-era rule protects workers from exactly that threat. Fortunately, Trump's plan, which enjoys strong support from the National Restaurant Association, has been withdrawn, at least for now.

The One Fair Wage campaign, like the better-known Fight for \$15, is advocating and mobilizing for an end to the tipped wage system. That would allow employees to have a reliable income and receive fairer compensation for their work.

One high-profile ballot campaign is in full swing in Washington, D.C., where voters will decide June 19 on Initiative 77. The campaign, led by women and people of color who work in D.C. as tipped employees in the restaurant industry, would increase the minimum wage by \$1.50 an hour per year until it reaches \$15 per hour in 2025.

One Fair Wage has active campaigns running in a number of states. CWA members have volunteered in many cities and states, including getting petitions signed for ballot measures. And we are working with progressive legislators who want to make One Fair Wage a reality at the local, state and federal levels.