

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

Report of the CWA National Committee on Civil Rights and Equity

Presidents Meeting
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CWA

CWA National Civil Rights & Equity Committee

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The CWA National Civil Rights & Equity Committee met January 10-11, 2024, in Montgomery, AL in conjunction with the MLK, Jr. Human Rights Conference hosted by the AFL-CIO which occurred from January 12-15, 2024. During this meeting, we were challenged to follow through with our commitment “to breathe” life into our National CR&E’s Committee Report accepted by the 2023 CWA Convention delegates.

We understood the assignment and boldly accepted the challenging work it would entail. This report to the 2024 Presidents’ Meeting will detail some of the individual and collaborative work facilitated by CWA’s National CR&E Committee Members to deeply strengthen our union by engaging our Districts, Sectors, Locals, Activists, Members, and Communities.

“A No Vote...Is A Vote”

~ 2024 CWA National Civil Rights & Equity Committee ~

Where Are They Now? Highlighting The Disparity In The Search For Missing Women Of Color

Kwami Barnes, CWA Local 4603, and Reginald Small, CWA Local 6215

Since our 2022 Convention report, a startling discovery has been made! 97,000 Black women have been reported missing in a 12-month period according to statistics from the National Crime Information Center. This very concerning trend shines as new light on the ever-increasing disparity facing the communities of color.

The action that we are building on is collaboration with like-minded groups. We have made an effort to educate and bring awareness and ideas on how to get information out to the community on missing women of color. Unfortunately, we can't rely on media coverage or for cases to be solved by law enforcement alone. We, the union, and the community must be engaged in this process. Particular attention is being placed with faith-based organizations, constituency organizations, and community service committees. There are specific plans to collaborate with the transportation unions.

CWA provides a specific platform via our Human Rights Department. As we promote Gender Justice and Equality across the country, we will also bring awareness to this highly important issue. We as activists believe that action is touching one person at a time from within and as well as outside of our union.

Signed into law on October 8th by California Gov. Gavin Newsome, the Ebony Alert, a first of its kind in the country, seeks to address racial disparities over missing persons of color cases in the U.S. In fact, on January 1, the Ebony Alert was used to successfully locate a missing 17-year-old young woman of color.

In conclusion, since the 2023 CWA Convention, in cooperation with the CWA Human Rights Department, we have held 18 training sessions across our union led by the Women's and Civil Rights and Equity Committee members. The topic of missing people of color is specifically covered in the Anti-Racist Union training. We will continue to host these training sessions as they are requested through the CWA website and via email request to the Human Rights Department at humanrights@cwa-union.org.

The Impact of Surveillance Technology and AI

Nikki Robinson, Local 2201

“Surveillance is a fact of life, so make privacy a human right.”

-Lawrence Cappello, Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama

Since the resolution at the National Convention in July 2023, Surveillance Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is quickly advancing and raising issues for Human Rights. The impact of Surveillance Technology and AI on human rights depends on many factors, such as the purpose, context, and governance of systems, as well as the values, norms, and laws that guide their development and use. This is an important issue for unions because we want to protect workers from the potential harms of surveillance and AI in the workplace. Other potential harms include replacing human judgment and reducing the workforce, setting unrealistic expectations for job performance, and even unfair or discriminatory decisions – like the hiring and firing of individuals.

The CWA Committee on Artificial Intelligence has already presented principles and recommendations on how to address the challenges that AI presents through both bargaining strategy and public policy. Members of the committee have direct experience working with AI programs from diverse industries, including call centers, telecommunications, journalism, and technology. Microsoft has entered an agreement with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) union regarding contractual terms focused on applying artificial intelligence (AI) at its ZeniMax video game studio.

Some of the organizations that CWA could team up with to help regulate surveillance technology and AI in the United States are the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT). There are many pieces of legislation that support or regulate surveillance and AI in different ways and at different levels of government. Some of the top ones are: *The Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence* issued by President Biden on October 30, 2023 and *The Artificial Intelligence 2023 Legislation* compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures. This compilation lists the bills, resolutions, and enactments related to AI in at least 25 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia in the 2023 legislative sessions. We can take those into the next session and continue to speak for our members.

Activities completed in our union that have helped strengthen the movement would include continuing to educate the members through Locals by presidents and individual committees along with being active in training opportunities available, such as the Building an Anti-Racist Union and Gender Justice training(s). If we can break down these barriers,

then it will make it easier to come together as informed union members. In our continued efforts, we will be creating an Action Network campaign in the fall of 2024 to have CWA members sign on and petition to re-introduce the ***Facial Recognition & Biometric Technology Moratorium***. This bill seeks to make it unlawful for any federal agency or official to “acquire, possess, access or use facial recognition and other biometric surveillance technology by federal law enforcement agencies.” It would also prohibit the use of federal funds to purchase such technology. “Facial recognition technology doesn’t just pose a grave threat to our privacy, it physically endangers Black Americans and other minority populations in our country,” U.S. Senator Ed Markey said in a statement. “As we work to dismantle the systematic racism that permeates every part of our society, we can’t ignore the harms that these technologies present.”

The work that we are doing now will pave the way to ultimate success for CWA in the realm of equality.

Health Disparities in the African-American Community

Kimberly Johnson, United-AFA 29011, and Errol Minor, CWA 3902

Professor Reddy, a Health Disparity Educator at Arizona State University, said, “There seems to be something specific about the African-American experience here in the United States that seems to have a toxic effect on the health of African Americans.”¹

We are actively working within our different cities and communities to educate our members about health disparities affecting various groups. Specifically, we are disseminating information about diseases that were highlighted in our 2023 report. African Americans continue to experience significant health and healthcare disparities, leading to higher rates of illness and premature death compared to other racial groups. In response to this issue since our 79th CWA Convention, we have been providing information on the leading causes of death in the African American community, such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, prostate cancer, and breast cancer. We aim to raise awareness in various forms and promote education to help address these health disparities and improve the overall health of our community.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has highlighted significant disparities in the birthing experience of Black women. They are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women. Recently, our union members were

¹NBC News, May 11, 2018. “How training doctors in implicit bias could save the lives of black mothers” <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-training-doctors-implicit-bias-could-save-lives-black-mothers-n873036>

educated on the PUMP Act, which grants most nursing employees the right to reasonable break time and a private, shielded space, other than a bathroom, to express breast milk while at work. This right is available for up to one year after the child's birth.

We are approaching management through our Union Benefit committees to address insurance companies and their wellness programs and how they are providing information on issues that affect minorities. Are these new diseases being brought to light and is educational information being shared? Conversations are being had to find the best way to implement changes to policies to cover certain medical conditions. Many insurance providers are acknowledging that there has been a disparity in health care over the years and they are making changes.

As the months and times have progressed, we are now focusing on the hidden stressors in communities of color. [The CDC has declared](#) that racism is a serious threat to public health that has placed communities of color at a greater risk. Racial trauma can result from direct experiences of racism along with physical and verbal attacks. The stress of constantly seeing police brutality on Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and nightly news and not knowing if our sons, daughters, parents, siblings, and friends can even make it home safely without being pulled over are daily assaults on our mental stability. Black people in some communities have higher rates of PTSD (8.7 percent) than white people (7.4 percent), and 65 percent of our African American youth who report traumatic experiences compared to 30 percent of their peers from other ethnic groups. In the book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* written by Dr. James H. Cone, Dr. Cone says "Whites often lynched blacks simply to remind the black community of their powerlessness." In this present-day society, Black Americans/People of Color do not see bodies swinging from trees, or mob violence, but the new lynching which is fear of traffic stops and that traffic stop being life-ending! These are invisible stressors that people of color are living with daily.

We National Committee members will continue to bring awareness to the health care needs of our communities of color and support our leaders who put forth legislation that provides for equality in health care.

Update on Voter Redistricting and the Effects on Labor

Shelia Bordeaux, CWA Local 9003. Reginald Pierre-Louis, CWA Local 1106

The stability of our labor movement is in jeopardy. Presidents, since we last addressed you in July of 2023 there has been an increase in activities related to redistricting and gerrymandering throughout the United States. Voting power throughout our country and districts continues to be stifled.

In our July 2023 CWA National Convention report, we highlighted instances in several states including Florida, where as recently as September 2023 a Florida Circuit Judge sent redistricting plans back to the Florida Legislature with instructions to draw new congressional maps after ruling the current maps violate the Florida Constitution and dilute Black voting power. You may recall in our previous report the U.S. Supreme Court had originally sided with a proposal by the Alabama legislature which opposed a lower Alabama court's decision. In September, however, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the lower Alabama court's order to redraw its seven-seat congressional maps to include a second majority Black district or "something close to it." Further examples include in Illinois, a study by the Princeton Gerrymandering Project, a nonpartisan group who studies the issue nationally, found that none of the state's 17 congressional districts were competitive and rated them with a grade of "F". A panel of three federal judges found Illinois lawmakers' guiding motivation was political and partisan; shielding the redistricting from constitutional review despite the impact on Black voters. A lawsuit in New York resulted in Democrats in the state legislature being able to restart the state's redistricting process. This would allow for the maps to be completed in time for the 2024 election.

We have only scratched the surface of how redistricting and gerrymandering continues to erode Voting Rights. In our quest to continue educating our members, we found additional states to highlight.

- In Georgia, a U.S. District Judge ruled parts of Georgia's redistricting plans probably violate federal law by protecting Republican borders including a way that threatens Democrat House of Representative member Lucy McBath.
- Instead of Mississippi voters choosing their legislators, State Senators, and Representatives are using redistricting to choose their own voters. The Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP and a group of Mississippi voters have [filed a federal lawsuit](#) to challenge the state's redistricting plan.
- The North Carolina Supreme Court reversed an earlier court ruling that struck down Republican maps as an excessive partisan gerrymander.
- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that South Carolina's new congressional district maps did not violate the law, despite diluting the voting strength of Black voters. The ruling will make it harder to challenge similar redistricting schemes in the future.
- [After five previous redistricting attempts by the Republican controlled Ohio Redistricting Commission were found unconstitutional](#), the Ohio State Supreme Court dismissed challenges to a new, nearly identical plan. The Republican majority on the court claimed that since the new plan had bipartisan support, the challenge was no longer relevant.

Our CWA Human Rights and LPAT committees are working hand in hand with our partners in this fight. We are educating our members on the importance of working in their communities and alongside neighboring communities. We have the most labor friendly U.S. President in decades, and we cannot allow gerrymandering or redistricting to dilute our power. Redistricting has given us a U.S Congress that is in disarray. It is threatening our democracy and enabling the continual attacks on our civil and human rights, the loss of freedoms, and government interference in the reproductive rights of women. We must fight to maintain and preserve workers' rights, civil rights, and human rights. Because when we fight... we win!!!

Bridging the Digital Divide, Hand in Hand

Lee Larkins, IUE-CWA Local 87465 and Vonda Wilkins, CWA Local 7019

"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but rather arises from the tireless work of many."

~ Bell Hooks

Imagine a future bathed in the glow of universal, blazing-fast broadband. Businesses bustling, families thriving, communities seamlessly connected. It's a future full of promises but it risks leaving many behind unless we bridge the digital divide.

CWA is involved in pushing hands-on workshops, dedicated mentorships, and partnerships with leading community colleges, but we are not stopping there. We are advocating fiercely for fair contracts that prioritize union labor. We're engaging policymakers at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and state-level offices while building coalitions with other labor unions and community organizations like the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. And CWA is continuing to spread the word about the value of skilled union workers in the media and social media platforms.

To ensure everyone gets a front-row seat in this digital transformation, we are making the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) work for CWA's workers by outlining our recommendations for states implementing the planning process.² Adopting direct in-house training, building commitments from sub grantees, and enforcing quality wages along with reasonable healthcare will strengthen our times ahead with amazing jobs. We are also laser-focused on career advancement, analyzing data from CWA membership surveys and tracking systems to ensure that acquired skills translate into better wages and brighter futures.

²https://docs.google.com/document/d/1i5cp3V6F7FhTGvN_ipueoLlatiq781L5qITuyov0ys/edit

This isn't just about wires and cables; it's about empowering communities and creating local jobs within broadband infrastructure projects. It's about crafting a future where working-class communities stand tall, connected, and thriving right alongside the tech world. It's also about ensuring the internet isn't just a luxury; it's a lifeline. So, when you hear about the broadband boom, remember this: it's not just about speed; it's about opportunity. With CWA on the front lines, working to secure union labor agreements for all funded broadband expansion projects, we can ensure that opportunity knocks on every door.

CWA locals are continuing to work together to build bridges, not walls, and make sure this broadband boom uplifts everyone, not just a lucky few. The future is connected, and CWA locals are making sure that everyone gets a seat at the table. We are advocating for policy changes that prioritize union labor standards and fair wages in government-funded broadband initiatives. This broadband boom won't build itself, and together, we can ensure it delivers a brighter future for all. STRONGER TOGETHER!

Garnering the Power of Our Collective to Prevent Gun Violence

Teesha Foreman, CWA Local 1180 and Timotheus Fitzgerald, TNG-CWA Local 32035

“We should be able to live in a society where the fear of gun violence does not exist” – April Parker

For decades, gun violence has taken a disproportionate and grueling toll on Black and Brown communities – leading to tens of thousands of gun deaths and hundreds of thousands of gun injuries. The impact of gun violence on this community is particularly devastating for young Black men. One in every 67 Black men ages 18 to 24 in Philadelphia was killed or injured in gun homicides or shootings³. In Rochester, New York, it was one in 50 young Black men⁴. In Cincinnati, it was one in 44 young Black men⁵. The vast majority of shootings in these cities – and in similar communities across the country – are perpetrated by a very small number of people. But the impact of this violence is felt across entire communities, contributing to generations of trauma and collective grief that have disproportionately affected Black people.

³ Shooting Victims Dashboard. <http://data.phila.gov/visualizations/shooting-victims>

⁴ Rochester, NY Shooting Victims <https://data-rpdny.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/rpdny::rochester-ny-shooting-victims/explore>

⁵ CPD Police Data Initiative <https://data.cincinnati-oh.gov/safety/PDI-Police-Data-Initiative-CPD-Shootings/7a3r-kxji/data>

More importantly, gun violence in Black communities is a direct cause and consequence of the systematic, structural disadvantage of these populations. Research shows that high rates of gun violence seen today have been forged by past and present racial discrimination, including historic racial segregation and disinvestment. As gun violence plagues these communities it leads to diminished economic opportunities and a lack of investment, creating a vicious cycle. This reality provides not only a strong impetus for action, but also a reminder that solutions to this problem must address the underlying inequalities driving gun violence in Black communities. There are proven ways to reduce gun violence in our communities, but most require the political will to make our communities and schools safer. We need to continue to educate our members on the importance of voting and voting for labor friendly politicians. The importance of having those politicians putting forth gun legislation like banning assault weapons, enacting universal background checks, reducing gun theft and trafficking, and supporting legislation to strengthen regulations on gun shops can prevent the flow of illegal weapons onto our streets and into the hands of criminals. CWA Locals work in collaboration with community-based organizations to empower the community to get involved!

Bronx SUV – Stand Up to Violence is a nonprofit community-based organization located in Jacobi Medical Center, Bronx, N.Y. SUV responds to victims of violent trauma and helps mobilize the community whenever there is a shooting. By providing supportive services (like talk and art therapy, case management, mentorship, community engagement, supportive and employment services, advocacy, and more) to high-risk individuals they work toward their goal of reducing gun violence in our communities.

Since the CWA National Convention in 2023, we've sought to partner with elected officials and community groups actively in working to reduce gun violence. We've volunteered with Stand Up to Violence and other nonprofits like Bronx Rises Against Gun (B.R.A.G.) Violence and Save our Streets (S.O.S.) in order to bring about gun violence change. The goal is to introduce these community-based programs to our five Borough Coordinating Committees. We want to empower them with knowledge, and resources that will make their schools and communities safe; engage youth in efforts to prevent and reduce gun violence; use peer education to increase youth awareness and involvement in strategies that reduce youth violence; and reduce the potential for youth violence in schools, families, and neighborhoods.

We've also identified a U.S. Congressman, Joseph Morelle (D-N.Y.) who has co-sponsored over a dozen bills on gun reform. We're planning to meet with Congressman Morelle to discuss ways that CWA can partner in efforts to ban assault weapons, enhance background checks, and raise the minimum age. Recently D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwab announced a new revolutionary program aimed at violence prevention. The program will give out grants (up to \$50,000) to local community-based nonprofits who

serve kids in the city to prevent them from becoming a victim of or a perpetrator of violence.

In conclusion, educating citizens and our own CWA members on gun safety will help reduce the currently growing incidents of accidental gun injury. This cannot be stressed enough with respect to our children being injured and sometimes fatally; this includes injury by “ghost guns” which are appearing at an alarming rate. Removing illegal and unregistered weapons from our streets will start saving lives instantly. Addressing mental illness concerns among those who can still find a way to access guns will save lives. Closing loopholes in our state and federal laws is an important first step. It will take all of us working together to bring about this needed change in our society. This change will benefit all CWA Members and their families and friends.

“We may not be able to save every child from gun violence, but if we save a few, that starts changing the atmosphere in our communities. Neighborhood by neighborhood one block by one block, one family at a time.” – President Obama