

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

Report of the CWA National Women's Committee

Presidents Meeting
June 24, 2024

CWA

CWA National Women's Committee

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The CWA National Women’s 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 Women’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 Women’s 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 Women’s Committee ~

The Merry Go-Round of Child Poverty

Yolanda Pearson - CWA Local 3204

In 2023, it came to light that almost 11 million children in the United States lived in poverty. This accounts for approximately one in seven children and almost one-third of all Americans living in poverty. UNICEF-World Bank report, Global Trends in Child Monetary Poverty According to International Poverty Lines, for the first time examined the trends in extreme child poverty and found that although the number of children living on less than US \$2.15 a day decreased from 383 million to 333 million (or 13 percent) between 2013 and 2022, the economic impact of COVID-19 led to the loss of three years of progress. This decline was 30 million fewer children than expected without COVID-19-related disruptions.

The report notes that, "Seven years ago, the world promised to end extreme child poverty by 2030. We have made some progress; however, compounding crises, from the impacts of COVID-19, conflict, climate change, and economic shocks, have stalled progress and left millions of children in extreme poverty. We can't, we should not nor will not fail these children now. Ending child poverty is not a choice but a must. Efforts must be increased to ensure that all children have access to essential services, including everyday actions such as education, nutrition, health care, and social protection while determining the root causes of child poverty."

Children make up more than 50 percent of the world's poverty levels. It is found that children are more than twice as likely as adults – 15.8 percent versus 6.6 percent – to live in extremely poor households, lacking the food, sanitation, shelter, health care, and education they need to survive and thrive.

"A world where 333 million children live in extreme poverty -- deprived not only of basic needs but also dignity, opportunity, or hope -- is simply intolerable, said World Bank Global Director for Poverty and Equity Luis-Felipe Lopez-Calva.. "It is more critical than ever that all children have a clear pathway out of poverty – through equitable access to quality education, nutrition, health, and social protection, as well as safety and security."

In the Women's Committee Report presented at the last convention, I asked all locals within CWA to agree to actions to address poverty, including starting a food pantry in your community and speaking to local officials, nonprofit organizations, and other community groups to families. We agreed to compile all the information we found into a user-friendly database to be used by all those in need. We would implement weekend tutoring and mentoring for the youth in our communities and make a presence in local schools.

Many unions have agreed to this pact. They have incorporated food banks and fundraising activities to buy necessary items for homeless shelters in their respective areas. Although some unions are still in the process of fulfilling their commitment, we should remember that saving even one child from poverty is a significant achievement. No child should have to live in poverty in a country that prides itself on being united and a family. Our children are our responsibility, and we must treat them as our own family.

Report Out for AFA-CWA on Paid Benefits Leave and the Force of Workers

By Yan Yan Teague

The United States has historically and consistently lagged behind developed countries in providing family leave benefits. FMLA allows you to take unpaid 12 weeks of job-protected leave for specific family and medical reasons.¹ However, the United States and Australia are the only developed countries that do not provide paid leave to women in regards to childbirth.² President Biden tried to bring paid family leave to all working people in the United States as part of his Build Back Better spending package, but it was cut.

2024 started off with a bang. New York state passed a bill that would allow 20 hours of pre-paid leave for prenatal appointments.³ They would be the first state in the U.S. to do this. Additionally, on January 8, 2024, the House introduced a bipartisan bill with a four-part framework that would increase those who qualify for paid leave.⁴ Minnesota in 2023, passed a state law that covers all employees full-time or part-time for paid leave, joining 11 other states that have a state paid medical/family leave.⁵ Furthermore, access to paid leave has increased from 24 percent in 2022 to 27 percent in 2023.⁶

Specifically, in regards to AFA-CWA, all 18 airlines have begun or will open contract negotiations with their airline management in 2024. With contract negotiations beginning, this is an opportunity to negotiate a comprehensive parental/medical leave policy including paid leave that would be inclusive of all family types. To ensure that paid leave is fair and financially equitable to both the worker and the employer, a leave at a minimum of 75 percent of the wage should be negotiated.

For Alaska, significant FMLA and paid leave benefits were negotiated into the new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Alaska Airlines management and AFA-CWA began negotiations on September 13, 2022. On April 7, 2023, during Negotiating Session 12, Section 15 of the CBA: Leave of Absences was negotiated and agreed upon.⁷ Two important FMLA related issues were addressed:

¹ FMLA Website: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/>

² Vahratian A, Johnson TR. Maternity leave benefits in the United States: today's economic climate underlines deficiencies. *Birth*. 2009Sep;36(3):177-9. doi: 10.1111/j.1523-536X.2009.00330.x. PMID: 19747263; PMCID: PMC4262924.

³ Paid time off for pregnant women could go national as work movement, led by New York, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/05/12/paid-time-off-for-pregnant-women-could-go-national-as-work-movement.html>

⁴ Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/01/08/house-lawmakers-release-bipartisan-paid-family-leave-plan/>

⁵ American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fast-facts-about-minnesotas-new-paid-leave-law>

⁶ SHRM: <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/benefits-compensation/access-to-paid-family-leave-climbed-2023>

⁷ <https://contract2022.afaalaska.org/committee/negotiation-session-12/>

1. Improved bereavement leave of absence to include miscarriage and stillbirth
2. Eliminated forced maternity leave timeline

These two issues are a big improvement for maternity leave, especially for women who are affected by miscarriages and stillbirths. The next big provisional improvement happened in Negotiating Session 15 pt. 1 on May 19, 2023, Section 16: Sick Leave Policy of the CBA.⁸ Management and AFA agreed to apply the best state sick leave policy to all flight attendants (instead of applying sick leave on a state-by-state basis as previously done). Sick leave policy, in addition to personal or family injury or illness would also include:

1. Preventive Care
2. Domestic violence (including harassment and stalking)
3. Sexual assault
4. Evacuation at domicile
5. Unsafe air quality/heat index

Adding these provisions to our leave policy would be one of the first in the airline industry to include climate change related issues to be covered by a leave policy.

Unfortunately, after the negotiating session on October 19, 2023, discussions with management failed to progress and came to a standstill. With management and AFA Alaska not able to come to continue negotiations, the agreed upon sections were scrapped and all CBA sections will have to be renegotiated.

For those who are not in a negotiating timeline, local unions should do a writing campaign to their congressperson to show support for paid leave in addition to working to add it to the new bargaining contracts.

Intersectionality: Actions in the fight in Gender Equality

by Ann Vogler, CWA Local 2009 and Cindy Krebs, CWA Local 4502

Intersectionality increases possibilities for social activism, thereby increasing the chances of bringing about social change. “There is no such thing as a single issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives.” These words spoken by Audre Lorde, capture the essence of intersectionality. Since we last convened at the 2023 National Human Rights convention, CWA and the Women’s Committee have worked hard to establish active Human Rights and Women’s Committees within their district and sectors to promote Intersectionality. We are holding monthly district meetings with local presidents to collaborate and get ideas for successful actions within our communities for All Women.

Anti-Racist trainings and Gender Justice trainings have been held across all districts as planned and additional trainings are planned for early 2024. These trainings provide a better understanding of diversity and intersectionality to bring about social change. Bringing

⁸ <https://contract2022.afaalaska.org/committee/negotiation-session-15-part-1>

attention to the effects of social struggles against injustices through solidarity between different marginalized groups is an effective way of improving the chances of overcoming such injustices.

We worked on the Equal Rights Amendment postcard campaign to support equality for all women and their reproductive rights. In Ohio, we held and attended rallies to vote NO on Issue 1 to require a 60 percent vote to pass a state constitutional amendment.

In August, CWA members attended the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom celebrating the day most remembered for Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech. These actions help build the locals and create solidarity within the membership. We have been inspired to go out and do the work in our community.

CWA members have helped local organizations put up signage to provide mammograms to uninsured women for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. In addition, CWA locals and sectors have worked with Catholic Charities and other organizations to collect hats, gloves, and socks for the homeless, participated in spaghetti dinners and in November, we served a delicious Thanksgiving meal with all the "fixins" to bring together our communities.

CWA Human Rights Committees have worked hard to tear down walls of division in society and build a bridge of commonality and shared goals through our Anti-Racist and Gender Justice training. Bringing attention to social struggles against injustices through solidarity between different marginalized groups is an effective way of improving the chances of overcoming these injustices. Through these actions, it gives everyone an equal voice at the table.

The Pink Wave II

Erin Mardon, NABET-CWA Local 51021 and Esthela Hernandez, CWA Local 9586

In May of 2022, news broke of a leaked draft of a Supreme Court decision; one that would overturn the landmark 1973 decision *Roe v. Wade*, that gave women in the United States the constitutional right to abortion. That leak soon turned into a Supreme Court decision which affected the entire country, especially women.

Last July, we spoke of a Pink Wave. Midterm elections were held in November of 2022, five months after the dismantling of *Roe v. Wade*. In just one month following the decision, the number of women registered to vote rose by 35 percent in the states that share voting data. Women were out-registering men, especially in states where abortion rights were at risk.

Strong female support helped kill six referendums that would have cost women access to abortion healthcare. Many Republican lawmakers who opposed abortion rights were defeated. The party as a whole underperformed, failing to capture the Senate, and barely keeping control of the House.

CWA was crucial in that effort, utilizing phone banks and postcard writing efforts to help elect two Democratic senators in Georgia, where abortion measures are considered very restrictive. The Women's Committee shared a link with all members, encouraging all to make sure they are registered to vote.

It is critical that CWA continues to push the effort to make sure all members are registered, because the fight is not over yet. The year 2024 saw a new wave of court cases and laws restricting abortion access throughout the country. In January, the Supreme Court allowed Idaho's abortion ban to go into effect, for now, and agreed to hear an appeal in the case, scheduling arguments for April. This is the first time the court has weighed in on the issue since overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The order could have widespread effects, empowering other states with less restrictive bans to pass more stringent laws.

Some Republican-led states continue to place more restrictions on abortion-related health care, including bans on the procedure when the life of the pregnant parent could be at risk.

Meanwhile, states with democratic lawmakers in the majority have generally kept, or even strengthened access to abortion healthcare. In September 2023, California's Governor Newsom signed four bills into law to protect medical providers who perform abortion services. These bills are to protect, improve, and make reproductive healthcare affordable and accessible to anyone needing services. This also helps anyone living in a state where abortion is criminalized to reach out to a California participating health care provider and have medication mailed to them.

This is why it is crucial that CWA continue its push to make sure members are not only registered to vote, but actively exercising that right, and electing lawmakers who will protect the lives and rights of our child-bearing siblings.

With the 2024 elections upon us, we will push these efforts even further, volunteering to phone bank, go door to door, and share vital information via social media and mailers.

At the National Human Rights Conference in Houston, Texas this summer, we will keep fighting back as the state of Texas continues to lead the nation in banning nearly all abortion rights since the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Women are being pushed to the brink of death before receiving care. This issue can no longer be seen as Democrat vs. Republican. It is life vs. death.

Youth and Peer Mentorship in the Union

LaTonya Wilcox, IUE-CWA Local 81381 and Liz Mercado, CWA Local 1101

In our report, "Youth and Peer Mentorship in the Union: Engaging and Educating Women and the Younger Generation in Unions and the Labor Movement" presented at the 2023 CWA Convention, it was stated that the resurgence of the labor movement presented a unique opportunity for the revival of leadership development. The key is mentorship! In

particular, mentoring the next generation and the women of our union transitioning into empowering positions will be definitive. The influence, guidance, or direction which one is given as a mentee enhances growth in their prospective field.

Immediate action was taken at the CWA Convention last July and attendees were provided opportunities to do online actions at the Human Rights Department's booth. They were asked to select the QR Code, which provided opportunities to become educated and to volunteer as mentors. *Compeer International* was approved to be a featured group for mentorship opportunities. Compeer's goal is to provide support through meaningful relationships that promote mental wellness for individuals with challenges.

The National Women's Committee members use the *How to Build an Anti-Racist Union* training module as a mentoring tool to help navigate and address issues of racism in the workplace and our communities. This training along with the addition of the *Gender Justice* training in December 2023, helped to provide additional moments to mentor future leaders into activism!

CWA continues to mentor youth and women leaders in the skilled trades, the Next Gen program, and the Minority Leadership Institute's mentorship program. Additionally, financial grants have been provided to youths between the ages of 15 -19 with opportunities to provide safe learning spaces within their communities. This also opens more opportunities for mentoring new leaders. Doors have been opened in high schools for labor leaders to train and mentor youths as a pathway to self-sufficiency.

Through our CWA National Civil Rights and Equity and National Women's Committees, we are providing open forums to discuss labor along with work on labor related issues. It is our responsibility as committee members to sharpen the outlook of our fellow committee members and local members to bring new ideas to our various District/Local Women's Committees in 2024.

Our CWA Human Rights Department and National Women's Committee are facilitating monthly and quarterly meetings to bring together CWA members in providing information and support. Committee members are active in mentoring and cultivating new leaders and supporting current leadership! Staff development modules such as shadowing, "walk-a-miles" and reinforcement training are also being utilized to mentor members. Locals are identifying and developing youth leadership through internships. High school students are also shadowing leadership and we are currently in the process of recruiting college students interested in learning about labor to gain experience.

The future of unions belongs to our next generations and also to women in higher positions in order to bring about an effective strong presence in the current reawakening of the Labor Movement! The time has come to pass the torch to our younger successors and so preparation should be a continuum for CWA. History is showing that most momentums in

successful structural organizations can lose their momentum when a lack of succession preparation is not in place. Mentoring more youth and women can ensure that there will be guardians to protect these gains at CWA and in the Labor Movement.

Mental Health Effects on Women Report

Desiree Navarro, CWA Local 7000 and Shawanda Rankin, CWA Local 6016

As previously outlined in the 2023 Women's Committee report, women face an increased risk regarding mental health issues, including a higher rate of suicide, anxiety, and eating disorders. Also noted were the cultural and societal impacts leading to the increased risk posed to women. It was recommended that CWA do more to raise awareness about personal mental healthcare in order to benefit our members.

Since the report was given, CWA has worked at every level to raise Mental Health Awareness. Many locals took it upon themselves to participate in Mental Health Awareness Month (every May), and members (including representatives on our National committees) have also set up Zoom wellness seminars attended by union siblings all across the country. Members have been taking the lead on efforts to improve Mental Health for members and nonmembers alike. Members have also been reaching out to the homeless population (a demographic disproportionately afflicted with adverse Mental Health struggles) and have been working hand in hand with siblings from other unions as well to provide personal hygiene items, non-perishable food items, clothing, and receptacles to hold their personal belongings in an effort to connect the homeless population with the community. These basic necessities bring dignity and a sense of personhood to a population that struggle to address their personal mental health needs.

CWA Locals continue to participate in fundraisers like Hope Grows Here, a nonprofit that works to support and provide resources for people experiencing Mental Health issues in their community. Our union is showing up and showing out for Mental Health awareness, and it is making a difference for everyone's future.

Furthermore, our Districts and Sectors have experienced immense mental health benefits from the Building an Anti-Racist Union and Gender Justice training. Since the 2022 Human Rights Conference in Phoenix, AZ, 25 of these training have been completed across our union sectors. The 2023 Mental Health Week and the Townhall on Wellness were well received by members and will be expanded throughout 2024. These training sessions and seminars are being made available to our members nationwide. Additional tools to create positive mental health experiences for our union family are providing an affirming, welcoming space to all within our ranks. Our union has a responsibility to continue the work of coalition building, and that starts from within our own union! We cannot ask others to stand with us, if we're not willing to stand with each other and do the hard work outside of our own comfort zones, if necessary. Basic respect for dignity and kindness, are

imperative to building a world where we can acknowledge when we, as people, are not doing okay. Acceptance gives us the space to work through our mental health needs when they arise.

To continue this positive momentum, it is imperative that mental health awareness continues to be emphasized on the national, district, and local levels. Our PHEW sector members may need an increased focus, as they work in public service and health fields that require them to be exposed to the behavioral extremes people in our society have to offer. Wellness seminars, holding actions for Mental Health Month in May, and including provisions for mental health care in our bargaining contracts are ways we can continue to increase awareness and advocate for our members. We will continue to schedule training sessions on our diversity initiatives and mental health support across all CWA sectors and are currently building a data structure to help ensure we are reaching out and following up with locals throughout our sectors, hopefully creating a best practice that can be utilized one day internationally.

Looking forward to the 2024 Human Rights Conference in Houston, Texas, we will be bringing mental health awareness to the forefront by holding Gender Justice and Building An Ant-Racist Union workshops. By giving attendees an opportunity to experience a brief overview of what our training modules have to offer, the attendees will depart the conference with a sense of urgency with regards to this issue and take it back to their respective Locals.