

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

# Report of the CWA National Civil Rights & Equity Committee

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# **CWA National Civil Rights & Equity Committee**

*As of April 15, 2025*

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## **Coded Language and Its Effect on Labor and Work Place Policies**

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

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election helped cement “dog whistle” or coded language as a political tactic. Within the past decade, we have seen an increase in covert or coded language, which has the effect of triggering specific demographics’ racial anxiety around political, social, and economic issues. We have seen the political parties use this playbook to reestablish their hold on the executive and legislative branches of our government and quite possibly a stranglehold on the judicial branch. Not only has our political landscape changed, but we also now see those very policies affecting workplace policy, with many corporations reversing many of the progressive initiatives that started in the wake of the George Floyd murder. In this case, language has power.

Coded language is a way of communicating that uses words or phrases to convey a hidden meaning. It can use symbols, metaphors, or phrases that a particular group understands but may not be apparent to outsiders. It can be used to manipulate policies and public opinion or get people to support things they would typically oppose. A modern-day example of this can be the use of the term “Obamacare” when discussing the Affordable Care Act. Coded language can be used to perpetuate discriminatory language and discrimination itself. Coded language also exists in marginalized communities to express resistance, share information, and communicate dissent without drawing unwanted attention from oppressive systems. An example of this would be the use of the phrase “sundown town” when describing cities and towns where African Americans would face potential issues of discrimination if caught there after sunset.

Given the rhetoric in today’s political climate, coded language has begun reestablishing regressive xenophobic, racist, misogynistic, and homophobic ideologies.

Labor has been at the forefront of many of our country's social and economic issues, and this will be no exception. By understanding the impact divisive rhetoric and language can cause, we will be well positioned to inform our members, communities, and constituency partners about the facts, not fears that potential legislation will have on our society. We must continue to educate our members regarding upcoming legislation designed to erode diversity, equity and inclusion and our power to collectively bargain for workers, safety, and just economic and social equity throughout our nation.

CWA must continue addressing the root causes of disparities, not just the symptoms. There must be an ongoing effort to ensure everyone, regardless of background, is encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of our unions, workplaces, and institutions. We must continue to promulgate a human rights legislative agenda..

CWA must have boots on the ground to help defeat any further erosion of our human rights

and focus on working to get the U.S. Senate to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2025 ( H.R.14), the Equality Act, the Dream Act, and the U.S. Citizenship Act.

Labor must continue using its platform legislatively to fight against deteriorating and regressive legislation and policies in the workplace and our communities. We must work closely with constituency groups to continue equality in all labor markets.

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## **Wrongful Convictions: A Critical Issue Today**

Nikki Robinson, CWA Local 2201

GUILTY! What if those were the last words you heard before being sentenced to 25 years to life for a crime you didn't commit? This nightmare scenario happens more often than we care to acknowledge. When innocent people are wrongfully convicted, they suffer significant personal, emotional, and financial harm. Their families and communities are also affected, experiencing the ripple effects of these injustices. Human rights frameworks emphasize the need for justice systems that protect individuals from such miscarriages of justice. This report explores the importance of addressing wrongful convictions, their impact on labor and working families, and strategies for mobilizing around this critical issue.

As of 2022, there have been 3,248 exonerations in the United States since 1989. Black Americans, who make up 13.6% of the U.S. population, account for 53% of these exonerations. Innocent Black Americans are seven times more likely than white Americans to be falsely convicted of serious crimes. In 2022, the number of exonerations in the U.S. hit a record high. These statistics highlight the ongoing issue of wrongful convictions and the significant racial disparities within the criminal justice system.

Wrongful convictions violate fundamental human rights, including the right to a fair trial and presumption of innocence. Socially and economically, wrongful convictions erode trust in the justice system and impose significant financial burdens, including legal costs and compensation. Wrongful convictions deeply affect labor and working families. Wrongfully convicted individuals often lose their jobs and face significant challenges in finding employment after exoneration, leading to economic instability. The struggle for adequate compensation and support during reentry further impacts their economic stability and labor market participation.

Labor unions can play a crucial role by supporting those affected, fostering community solidarity, and implementing educational programs to raise awareness about wrongful convictions and systemic biases. Addressing wrongful convictions aligns with the mission of labor unions to protect and uplift working families, ensuring justice, challenging systemic biases, and upholding workers' rights.

Supporting affected members involves providing legal aid, counseling, and job training programs to help exonerees reintegrate into the workforce. Public engagement through rallies, protests, and social media campaigns will raise awareness and build support. Encouraging member involvement through volunteer opportunities and grassroots initiatives will further mobilize the union. Continuous dialogue with members, including regular updates and feedback channels, ensures the strategy remains effective.

Technological advances in forensic science have been key in exonerating the wrongfully convicted. Advocacy and reform movements have led to policy changes aimed at preventing wrongful convictions and supporting exonerees.

To effectively mobilize around wrongful convictions, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) should establish a dedicated task force to plan and implement the strategy. This includes developing educational programs such as workshops and seminars to inform members about wrongful convictions, systemic racism, and biases in the criminal justice system. Getting more members to complete the Building An Anti-Racist Union training will be a start. Advocating for policy changes at local, state, and federal levels is crucial, with a focus on improving public defense resources, fair trial procedures, and compensation for the wrongfully convicted. Partnering with organizations like the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project, the Exoneration Project, and the Innocence Network will amplify efforts and create a broader coalition for change. These partnerships have been crucial in advocating for systemic changes and supporting exonerated individuals.

Highlighting success stories by inviting exonerees to speak at events and publishing case studies will build empathy and demonstrate the impact of these efforts. One notable historical example is the case of labor activist and union member Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who was wrongfully convicted of murder in the 1960s. His case drew significant attention and support from labor unions, civil rights organizations, and the public. The collective efforts to exonerate Carter highlighted the intersection of labor rights and social justice, demonstrating the critical role unions play in addressing wrongful convictions. Other high-profile cases include the Groveland Four, a group of Black men wrongfully convicted of kidnapping and raping a white teenager in 1949, and the exoneration of Muhammad A. Aziz and Khalil Islam, who were wrongfully convicted in the assassination of Malcolm X. and that of Alexander McClay Williams, a 16-year-old Black teenager wrongfully convicted and executed in 1931. His conviction was based on coerced confessions and a lack of physical evidence. In 2022, his conviction was vacated, and he was posthumously exonerated. These examples illustrate the persistent challenges within the criminal justice system and the importance of reformation.

Recent exonerations underscore the urgent need for continued advocacy and reform to prevent these injustices and support those who have been wrongfully imprisoned. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) recognizes the profound impact wrongful convictions have on individuals, families, and communities. By mobilizing around this issue, CWA can play a crucial role in advocating for systemic change, supporting affected members, and raising public awareness. This commitment will help ensure justice, challenge systemic biases, and uphold the rights of all workers. Together, we can create a more equitable and just society for everyone.

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## **The Intersection of Poverty, Education, and Exploitation: Underserved Schools and Child Trafficking**

Errol Minor CWA Local 3902 and Kimberly Johnson AFA-CWA Local 29011

The state of our public schools in marginalized communities reflects broader societal inequities. Funding disparities are not just numbers—they represent opportunities denied, futures jeopardized, and communities undermined. Disparities in funding gaps translate to overcrowded classrooms, underpaid teachers, and a lack of critical resources. These schools frequently lack access to essential mental health programs, counselors, and educators trained to handle the complex challenges students face. As a result, children in these environments are at a heightened risk of falling through the cracks. For example, public school systems in marginalized communities had to rely on pandemic relief funds to provide basic necessities like internet access and tutoring.

The consequences are not limited to academic performance. These systemic inequities increase vulnerability to child trafficking, as children in distressed environments are often left without the safeguards they need. Shockingly, up to 90% of youth involved in commercial sexual exploitation have histories of neglect, abuse, or homelessness—issues that schools can help address with the right support.

For many, the consequences are devastating. Poverty, emotional distress, neglect, and abuse—all too common in marginalized communities—create conditions that traffickers exploit. Globally, an estimated 12 million children are involved in human trafficking. In the United States, children in underfunded schools are particularly vulnerable, especially those with histories of homelessness, neglect, or abuse. Studies show that up to 90% of youth involved in commercial sexual exploitation have faced significant prior trauma. These numbers are alarming and should prompt us to act with urgency.

Underfunded schools often lack the resources to provide adequate security measures, counseling services, and educational opportunities, leaving children in these systems more susceptible to exploitation. Many of these children come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, making them easy targets for traffickers who exploit their lack of support and resources.

Children in public schools within marginalized communities face significant challenges stemming from systemic inequities in economic, social, and structural frameworks. These barriers often manifest as underfunded schools, insufficient access to mental health and support services, and increased exposure to adverse circumstances such as poverty and abuse. Beyond perpetuating cycles of inequality, these conditions expose children to heightened risks of human trafficking, particularly child sex trafficking.

The issue of public-school funding disparities is particularly important for the Communications Workers of America (CWA) due to several key factors:

**1. Impact on Members' Families and Community Stability:**

- o Many CWA members are parents, guardians, or community stakeholders. The safety and well-being of their children are directly tied to the environments provided by local schools. Combating trafficking protects families and strengthens community bonds, ensuring stability for all.

**2. CWA's Broader Commitment to Social and Economic Justice:**

- o CWA has a long-standing history of advocating for equity and fairness. Addressing the link between public school funding disparities and child trafficking aligns with the union's mission to fight for justice and human rights.

**3. The Future Workforce and Union Membership:**

- o Children in marginalized public school systems represent the future workforce. Protecting them from trafficking ensures they have the opportunity to grow into empowered individuals who can contribute to the economy and become potential union members.

**4. Policy Advocacy and Legislative Influence:**

- o CWA's influence in the legislative arena positions it as a powerful advocate for policies aimed at reducing school funding disparities and implementing robust anti-trafficking measures.

Marginalized public school systems, particularly in areas with high rates of homelessness, neglect, and abuse, often serve as environments where traffickers can identify and exploit vulnerable children. Studies reveal that up to 90% of youth involved in commercial sexual exploitation have faced significant prior trauma.

As an influential union, CWA can play a pivotal role in combating child trafficking in public schools, particularly in marginalized communities. First and foremost, CWA can advocate for increased funding for schools in underserved areas, ensuring that resources are allocated to prevention programs, mental health services, and training for school staff to identify signs of trafficking.

In addition, CWA can collaborate with school administrators and lawmakers to push for policies that require all school personnel—teachers, counselors, and staff—to undergo training on recognizing the signs of trafficking. Research from the U.S. Department of

Education emphasizes the importance of such training, noting that educators and school resource officers (SROs) often encounter children who are at risk but may not recognize the warning signs unless adequately trained.

Mobilizing around the issue of funding disparities in public schools, particularly regarding teacher pay and resources in marginalized communities, can involve various labor union actions. Public school funding disparities, especially between affluent and marginalized districts, are highly relevant to Communications Workers of America (CWA) and labor in general because they impact labor rights, economic equity, and the well-being of working families across various sectors.

### **Partnering with NOBLE to Keep Children Safe**

One of the most effective strategies in combating child trafficking is building partnerships with law enforcement agencies. NOBLE, with its deep expertise in law enforcement and community engagement, is an ideal partner for CWA in the effort to protect children in marginalized communities.

The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) has partnered with various communities to combat child trafficking through its Child ID program, which plays a critical role in safeguarding children, particularly in marginalized communities. The program distributes Child ID kits that contain important identification information, such as fingerprints, photographs, and other distinguishing details, which can be instrumental in tracking and identifying children who may become victims of trafficking or other criminal activities.

One of the key benefits of the Child ID program is its ability to provide immediate, detailed information to law enforcement when a child goes missing. Time is of the essence in trafficking cases, and having a pre-prepared ID kit can significantly speed up the process of locating a missing child. Law enforcement agencies report that in the event of a missing child, having an ID kit can be the difference between a swift resolution and a prolonged search.

Furthermore, NOBLE's collaboration with local police departments, community leaders, and other organizations has helped extend the reach of this program into areas with high rates of missing children. Notably, the program focuses on protecting minority children, who are disproportionately targeted by traffickers.

Together we can confront a crisis that strikes at the heart of our communities—educational inequities in marginalized public schools and their direct connection to child trafficking.

As members of the Communications Workers of America, we have a responsibility to act. This is our fight, our responsibility, and our moment to lead.

This is about more than education; it's about economic and social justice. We must demand equitable school funding, advocate for higher teacher pay, and support programs like NOBLE's Child ID initiative, which protects children from trafficking.

The time to act is now. Let us unite our voices and our power to demand change. Let us ensure that no child's future is dictated by their zip code, that no child falls victim to preventable vulnerabilities, and that every child in America has the opportunity to learn, thrive, and be safe.

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## **Homelessness in America**

By Kwami Barnes, CWA Local 4603

Homelessness remains a persistent and complex issue in the United States, affecting individuals and families across the nation. Despite efforts to address the problem, the number of people experiencing homelessness has been on the rise. This report aims to provide an overview of homelessness in the U.S., including its scope, causes, and potential solutions.

In 2023, an estimated 653,104 people experienced homelessness in the United States. This is a 12% increase from the previous year, this represents the highest number recorded since 2007.

A significant portion of the un-housed population, approximately 256,610 people, are unsheltered, meaning they reside in places not meant for human habitation, such as streets, parks, or abandoned buildings. Homelessness disproportionately affects certain populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, veterans, and individuals with disabilities or mental health issues.

A primary driver of homelessness is the severe shortage of affordable housing. Rising rents and stagnant wages make it increasingly difficult for low-income individuals and families to secure stable housing. Economic factors such as job loss, poverty, and lack of access to economic opportunities contribute to homelessness.

Mental illness, substance abuse, and chronic health conditions can lead to and or exacerbate homelessness. Systemic racism, discrimination, and lack of access to healthcare and social services are all factors that contribute to homelessness.

Potential solutions include an increase in affordable housing, expanding the availability of affordable housing through government subsidies, incentives for developers, and zoning reforms.

We can address economic inequalities through policies that promote living wages, job training, and access to employment opportunities which can help prevent homelessness. Unions fight for higher wages, better benefits (like healthcare and retirement), and stronger job security. This directly combats poverty, a major driver of homelessness.

We can improve access to healthcare by expanding access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as affordable alternatives which can help individuals maintain stability. By providing support services we can help individuals experiencing homelessness transition to stable housing. Investing in prevention programs that address the root causes of homelessness, such as early intervention for at-risk families and youth, can help to reduce the number of people who become un-housed.

Homelessness in the United States is a complex issue with no single solution. CWA locals can be the change we seek by supporting efforts to combat homelessness and uplift the un-housed in their local communities. Addressing this crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that includes increasing affordable housing, addressing economic inequality, improving access to healthcare, and support services, and implementing prevention strategies. By working together, we can create a society where everyone has a safe and stable place to call home.

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## **Establishing Effective Human Rights Committees Through Collaboration and Constituency Groups**

Reginald Small, CWA Local 6215

Active Human Rights Committees ensure the survival, growth, and relevance of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and all unions in today's increasingly diverse social landscape. It is imperative that we continuously raise awareness among our members regarding critical issues—including but not limited to—gender bias, gender equity, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Partnerships with constituency groups play a vital role in the effectiveness and success of the Communications Workers of America's (CWA) Human Rights Committees. These collaborations with organizations aligned in mission and values enable us to confront systemic inequalities, elevate the voices of marginalized communities, and cultivate a collective sense of power across a wide range of diverse groups. By forming strategic alliances with these organizations, we enhance our capacities as activists and enrich our understanding of the critical initiatives undertaken within our Local Human Rights Committees.

Local human rights committees disseminate the message about the importance of these partnerships among the rank and file, ensuring that all members become aware of and engage with this critical work.

The constituency groups supported by the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) include various organizations representing different demographics, such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, Pride at Work, the Union Veterans Council, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and the Alliance for Retired Americans.

The overarching goal of these constituency organizations is to promote organizing efforts specifically among communities of color, women, retirees, and individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+). Through these efforts, they strive to create a more inclusive and equitable environment within their unions and the labor movement. These groups work tirelessly to ensure that diversity and inclusion are not just stated values but are actively practiced in all facets of labor organizing, policymaking, and union leadership. By doing so, they contribute to a robust labor movement that genuinely represents and supports the needs and interests of all its members.

To address these critical issues effectively, we must expand our training programs, which provide essential education on human rights and social justice topics. These programs should cover a wide range of subjects, including the historical context of discrimination, challenges faced by marginalized groups, and strategies for fostering inclusivity within our workplaces.

Furthermore, we should encourage active participation in constituency group activities that resonate with our members. These activities not only build connections and solidarity among our members but also empower them to advocate for their rights and the rights of others. By working together, we can create a united front to combat injustice and promote equality across all demographics within our union.

Additionally, we must leverage our platform to actively promote education and empowerment. By doing so, we can equip our members with the tools and knowledge needed to confront and dismantle the systemic racism and bias that persist in our society. Together, through these efforts, we can achieve true equality and justice for all our members and ensure that every voice is heard and valued.

To effectively strengthen labor movements, we must draw support and participation from all sectors of society, including marginalized communities and various professional fields. An inclusive labor movement cannot thrive if we continue to allow the divisive tactics used by the wealthiest 1% to undermine our unity. This includes strategies that exploit our differences, whether based on class, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, to fracture our collective power.

To build a robust and unified movement, we must actively engage in dialogue that honors and respects these differences, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. Recognizing and addressing issues such as gender inequality, racial discrimination, and the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals is not just an added benefit but a fundamental requirement of our struggle for labor rights. By incorporating these human rights as integral components of our efforts, we enhance our collective strength and forge a more equitable future in the workplace for everyone. This approach fosters solidarity among workers and champions the dignity of all individuals, thereby creating a more robust and inclusive labor movement.

We will establish a strong human rights presence at all conferences, conventions, and district meetings to mobilize effectively. We will highlight the importance of active local Human Rights Committees and provide resources and training to support local leaders in forming their committees. Additionally, we will create brochures and educational materials to assist in developing and expanding these committees. This will help engage more members in the process and empower them to advocate for human rights within the labor movement.



Establishing effective local Human Rights Committees requires intentional collaboration with constituency groups to ensure inclusivity and impact. By defining clear goals, building partnerships, and prioritizing education, HRCs can champion equity and justice within organizations and communities. Together, these committees can create sustainable change and foster a culture of respect and fairness for all.

We must re-commit ourselves to the CWA Constitution by having active human rights committees in every CWA Local!

## **Unnecessary Force on Defenseless Civilians**

Vonda Wilkins, CWA Local 7019 and Lee Larkins, IUE-CWA Local 84765

*"You were put here to protect us. But who protects us from you?" KRS-One*

The persistent problem of excessive force by law enforcement continues to plague our society, demanding immediate and urgent attention. Recent incidents vividly illustrate the pervasiveness of this issue. In September 2024, a football player was excessively shoved by police during a traffic stop. Similarly, a deaf man with cerebral palsy was subjected to excessive force by police in August 2024. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Justice found civil rights violations by a local police department in June 2024, highlighting a pattern of excessive force used against civilians.

The use of excessive force by law enforcement has a long history, dating back to slave patrols in the 1700s. This legacy continued through the formation of local police departments in the 1900s, which often enforced discriminatory Jim Crow laws. Despite peaceful demonstrations and the exercise of fundamental civil liberties, excessive force continues to be executed against defenseless civilians.

Each year, more than 50 million people in the U.S. have some point of contact with law enforcement. About one million of them would have experienced police threats or use of force during their interaction with them, and an estimated 250,000 encounter injury. At the same time, 75,000 suffer non-fatal injuries but require hospital treatment. Similarly, many miscalculate the extent of the invisible disability community, which includes more than 61 million people in one out of three U.S. households, and especially the importance of connecting the intersection of race and disability.

By uniting and working together, we can advocate for policies and training that promote de-escalation tactics and reduce the use of excessive force. This collaboration is not just beneficial; it's essential. It can help foster better understanding and trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

We must adopt a multifaceted approach to address these issues, including enacting legislation to protect vulnerable populations. We can create a society where everyone feels safe and protected, regardless of race, ethnicity, or invisible disabilities. Accepting unnecessary physical force contact as a personal privilege as our law enforcement adheres to their Oath of Honor is not an option.

Advocating for the passage of "Eric's ID Law" in states where it has not yet been implemented is a crucial step towards protecting individuals with invisible disabilities during encounters with law enforcement. The option to voluntarily self-identify as having an invisible disability on one's identification card can help prevent misunderstandings and ensure that law enforcement officers are aware of any special needs or accommodations

that may be necessary. Our districts, sectors, and locals can organize and mobilize efforts to educate the public and communities about excessive force. By creating a path in addressing invisible disabilities (such as Eric's ID Law) and providing best practices for interacting with individuals with disabilities, our law enforcement and our communities will experience safer interactions. Our National Human Rights Committee has already started the call to action by advocating for the "Eric's ID Law" petition to be signed by every activist participating in the interactive activist mall at the Human Rights Conference in August 2024.

From the legacy of slave patrols to recent incidents of police brutality, the need for comprehensive reform is clear.

Law enforcement officers take an oath to protect and serve their communities. This oath includes upholding the law and respecting the rights of all individuals. Officers who use excessive force violate this oath and betray the public's trust.

Let us work together to ensure that the oath taken by law enforcement officers is not just a collection of words but a guiding principle that shapes their actions and protects the rights of all. The time for change is now.

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## **Striking Down Mental Health Stigma**

Tim Fitzgerald, TNG-CWA Local 32035 and Teesha Foreman, PHEW-CWA Local 1180

“Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all.” – President Bill Clinton.

“Mental health issues are a sign of a weak person.” This is just one of the countless false beliefs held by millions of people. These negative notions, based on misunderstanding, ignorance, and often fear, are commonly referred to as stigma. Mental health stigma is characterized by negative attitudes and discrimination against individuals with mental health challenges. It remains a significant barrier to seeking help and achieving workplace inclusion. In many industries, employees hesitate to disclose mental health issues due to fear of judgment or repercussions. As collective representatives of workers, CWA has the potential to lead transformative change in how mental health is perceived and supported in the workplace.

Mental health conditions are prevalent in the workplace. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, more than one in five people in the workplace experience a mental health condition. Why is it essential to change the stigma that others hold about mental health? When people feel strongly about an issue, they set out to push their beliefs onto others. Misconceptions, in general, can lead to disastrous actions. Left uncorrected, false notions will spread throughout the country faster than a forest fire. When you compound that spread rate with the acceleration of the growing number of mental health stigmas, we have an exponentially growing catastrophe in our country.

Mental health stigma is pervasive and entrenched in our society and, therefore, must be aggressively addressed. It manifests itself primarily in three distinct forms. First, there's public stigma. Public stigma is widespread notions that maintain stereotypes about mental illness. Second, there's self-stigma. This is the internalized shame and guilt experienced by individuals with very real mental health challenges. This leads to fear of being judged or labeled - preventing people from seeking professional help for their mental health issues. The Center for Disease Center (CDC), Health Affairs, NAMI reports that nearly 60% of people with mental illness are untreated. Lastly, structural stigma represents the systemic barriers within institutions like healthcare or workplaces that limit access to mental health services for people with mental illness and prohibit an inclusive work environment. All forms negatively affect employee engagement, including lowered workplace morale, decreased productivity, and strained workplace relationships. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 40% of employees with a mental illness take time off because of it (up to 10 days a year) resulting in four million lost workdays per year.

The widespread impact of mental health stigma may never be accurately measured because many of the numerous effects on workers are not reported. As noted above, stigma discourages workers from seeking professional help, which leads to untreated or worsened conditions. Untreated mental health conditions, over time, result in higher health care costs overall. Fear of disclosure may result in affected people withdrawing from social and professional networks, creating social isolation. That invariably leads to absenteeism and lower job performance, causing a decrease in workplace productivity and employee engagement.

Workers with mental illness also face workplace discrimination because of the negative perceptions of their abilities.

Legislation has also passed to aid in the fight against mental health stigma. For example, in New York, Governor Kathy Hochul signed new legislation (S.6635/A.5745) to support working people facing job-related mental health crises. This law will allow any worker to file for worker's compensation for specific types of mental injury premised on extraordinary work-related stress.

CWA has consistently advocated for workers' rights, equitable treatment, and safe working conditions. Attacking mental health stigma aligns with these core values. Therefore, our mission is to address this problem from multiple perspectives.

We must:

1. Change workplace policies by negotiating for mental health coverage and anti-discrimination clauses explicitly addressing mental health.
2. Organize workshops and training sessions to educate members about mental health issues. Collaborate with mental health organizations to provide resources and expert-led discussions.
3. Establish peer-led support groups while creating confidential avenues for members to seek help without fear of stigma.
4. Advocate for flexible work arrangements and reasonable accommodations for employees managing mental health challenges while ensuring compliance with legal protections, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

By directly addressing mental health stigma, CWA will enhance the lives of its members and contribute to healthier, more inclusive work environments.