

AFGE



Local 3369

THE GOOD FIGHT



2/3 of SSA workers are comprised of women. Women still don't get equality in the workplace. Use your voice to stand for what is right. Equality for women means equality for all!

Good things happen when you stand up for yourself

For months, at the end of 2018 many of the employees in the Jamaica District Office were feeling unusually overworked, over stressed, underappreciated, and mismanaged. This is not too different from the way SSA employees feel in general in regards to their respective offices. What makes Jamaica an anomaly in a cacophony of overburdened SSA offices is that the Jamaica staff chose to unify their voices with the purpose of exacting change. They did this in the form of requesting a meeting with Management and the Union in order to elucidate their grievances and enact change in the office.

It was with great trepidation and courage that the Jamaica staff embarked on a path that could potentially harm their individual quests for promotions and possibly even subject them to harsher working conditions than they were accustomed to. As daunting as this was, with the guidance and resolve of President Edwin Osorio, the Jamaica staff decided that defending their principles was more important than looking the other way and hoping things would get better on their own. This perseverance paid off because after a detailed letter from President Edwin Osorio to Acting Commissioner Berryhill enumerating their grievances on the myriad ways they were being mistreated by their manager.

This collective protest against their exploitation as employees led to the removal of the manager from the Jamaica office. This was an outcome that was not only best for the employees in Jamaica, but an outcome that should demonstrate to all employees the importance of solidarity and working lockstep with the Union. While it cannot be guaranteed that every ineffective or rude management personnel will be removed at the whim of a body of employees, it is a virtual guarantee that if you do nothing, you are giving your tacit approval and support to any misbehaving management personnel that goes unchallenged and there will be no change. You truly have nothing to lose standing up for yourself as a group and potentially everything to gain.

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Local 3369 General Membership Meeting

2019 AFGE Legislative Conference

Local 3369 Takes the Lead in Defending SSA employee rights

AFGE embarked on their annual legislative conference with the usual fanfare; espousing their advocacy for better pay, a secure and fair retirement system, and equality amongst all federal employees. What makes this year different than others are the issues that affect SSA employees that are most unique to SSA employees. So when members of Local 3369 entrusted President Edwin Osorio and Treasurer Jennifer Ramirez to go down to Washington D. C during the most crucial and challenging of times known to Local 3369, it was well understood that the members of Congress needed to understand under no uncertain terms that SSA employees are being pushed beyond their capacity.

Because of the importance of enlisting the responsiveness and support of Congress, it was decided that Local 3369 would spend three full days lobbying on Capitol Hill on behalf of its members. In the last couple of years, Local 3369 has been increasingly more successful at procuring more appointments with the member of Congress, instead of the legislative aid. This gives Local 3369 direct access to the office and the decision making apparatus within Congress. One example of this was the February 12 meeting with Congressman Peter King. After hearing about contract negotiations the agency in bad faith abruptly concluded; and the injurious effects of PQR on the employees, the Congressman wrote a letter on February 14 to Acting commissioner Nancy Berryhill urging her to reconsider the actions of the agency. Just off the heels of a 35 day government shutdown, there is a public sentiment of empathy for federal employees that is currently unpatrolled in modern labor history. The timing for our visit could not be more serendipitous.

We met with the offices of Peter King, Grace Meng, Lee Zeldin, Jose Serrano, Sean Patrick Maloney, Thomas Suozzi, Adriano Aspaillat, Katherine Rice, Nydia Velazquez, Max Rose, Carolyn Maloney, and Elliot Engel. Among the topics of discussion were: contract negotiations, PQR, harassment and hostile work environment, paid maternity leave, management accountability, and severe understaffing in all SSA offices.

This trip set the framework for an ongoing dialogue between Local 3369 and our members of congress. During our initial discussions, our congressional leaders displayed great consternation in the Agency's determination to abridge SSA employee's rights and their unwillingness to treat SSA employees with the respect and dignity that they have earned through their hard work and dedication to public service. We received several commitments from key congressional allies to write letters to SSA Acting Commissioner Nancy Berryhill in regards to unfair bargaining practices and to make inquiries into the true efficacy of PQR. As stated above, Congressman King didn't even wait for us to leave DC to write his letter! They also displayed a great concern for the Agency's HPO procedures and are interested in exploring ways of bringing transparency and accountability to the Agency. This is just the beginning. Local 3369 will work diligently with Congress to fight for the security and rights of all SSA employees. But you can do your part by making sure the Union is always aware of any actions that seem to be in conflict with your rights as a federal employee.



Meeting with Congressman Jose Serrano



Meeting with Congressman Peter King

(right) AFGE meeting with Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney



I Love my Country Does my Country Love Me?

Most SSA employees became federal employees because of the love they have for helping their fellow Americans. This can become demoralizing when you work for an Agency and a government that seems to spend most of its time figuring out how to make you miserable and rob you of your civic pride. Since 2018 there seems to be a proliferation of anti-federal employee activity that has made federal employment less desirable than ever before. Even though the Union prevailed against the government's attempts to make it easier to fire federal employees and weaken the Union's ability to represent them, SSA has been relentless at finding ways to circumvent the invalidation of the executive orders the president signed on May 25, 2018.

Not only has the Agency proceeded through its bad faith bargaining over contract negotiations to roll back employee rights that were negotiated over the years for federal employees, it has tacitly decided that all bargaining unit employees are expendable. And if that isn't enough, the Executive branch of the government is currently pursuing draconian changes to federal employee compensation, designed to break the commitment it has made to federal employees.

The president's 2020 budget proposal targets federal employee's health and retirement benefits. On the backs of federal employees, the budget is expected to reduce the federal deficit with reductions to federal contributions to healthcare and retirement benefits; a cost of living increase for employees under FERS would be eliminated; the budget would also eliminate the Special Retirement Supplement, which provides additional income for those employees that retire before age 62, when Social Security kicks in. The government also has planned to reduce the interest on the G fund in the Thrift Savings Plan, in addition to raising employee contributions to the federal annuity. Retirement calculations, which now are based on the last three years of service, under the new budget will be based on the last five years of service.

If this hasn't convinced you that the Agency has lost its loving feeling for SSA employees, keep in mind that PQR is being utilized as a tool to eliminate SSA employees. The only way we can combat any of these changes is to band together and let our voices be heard. Individually we need to stand against the Agency's attempts to oppress us with righteous indignation. When we do this, collectively we will become transformative. We need to put a stop to the acrimonious treatment bargaining unit employees endure everyday while management acts with unfettered unaccountability and complete impunity. All lives matter. This doesn't just speak to the sanctity of life, but to the quality of life; and you can't have quality of life without equality in life.

(right) President Osorio discusses the impact of PQR on SSA employees with Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney.



Selfie with Congressman Lee Zeldin, Sherry Jackson (3rd VP of Council 220), and Teresa Price.

WHY SHOULD I FILE A GRIEVANCE?

Have you ever felt too sick to go to work, but was afraid to call in because it was the day after a holiday? Or even worse, you did call in and your management said you needed a doctor's note, even though it was just one day and you didn't need to go to the doctor? Have you ever requested an annual day and been denied because it was a "maxed out day?" Have you ever wanted to complain about getting twice as much work as your co-worker? Have you ever noticed that management expects you to accomplish twice as much work when you telework?

These are typical situations that many employees encounter all of the time. And the reason why employees accept it most of the time is because they feel by challenging management, they are making things worse for themselves. Employees believe that if they stand up for their rights, management will retaliate; management will label them as trouble makers, making sure the employee will never get a detail, or a promotion, or be considered for desirable workloads. The truth is that without giving management a compelling reason to stop violating the contract, they won't because it is in management's interest to continue behaving the same way—how it affects you does not matter to them. And because it benefits them when they violate your rights, they will never stop this behavior until you force them to do so. The way you do this is by filing a grievance.

Management has created a culture of treating employees like they are machines and don't deserve respect; treating employees like they don't have feelings or any sense of pride; employees are asked to do more work without ever acknowledging the fact that they are human beings and want to do their job with a feeling of self-worth and appreciation for their contributions. As valued employees you deserve to be recognized for what you contribute and should never be subjected to the dehumanization that permeates SSA offices across the country today.

Everybody has somebody they have to answer to and that includes your management. Unfortunately, management acts as though there is nothing wrong with them trying to impress their superiors at your expense instead of with your partnership. In one sense, you can see that local management doesn't feel like they have a choice, but their inability to find tenable solutions that don't involve your exploitation is unacceptable. And until you let them know that it is unacceptable by filing a grievance against them, they will continue to take advantage of you; they may not act this way to purposely injure you, but that doesn't excuse their willingness to treat you like you are incompetent or you don't deserve respect. It is human nature to continue what works for them until it doesn't work anymore. Don't let their mistreatment of you work for them anymore. Call your Union and file a grievance!

Greetings From Council 220!

By Ralph DeJulius, Council 220 President



First and foremost, let me tell you what a great guy you have in Edwin Osorio, he has a heart for representing members and truly believes in promoting the interests of employees. Thank you Edwin! At the time of this writing, I have been Council President for barely three weeks. To say that the last two weeks were anything less than a complete whirlwind of issue after issue, and surprise after surprise, would be a complete understatement! SSA has hit us hard at the bargaining table. SSA told the Union that it was through bargaining a successor contract and sent their contract proposals (a worse version of the en-joined July 2018 Executive Orders) to the Federal Services Impasses Panel (FSIP). (Note, the members of the FSIP are all appointed by President Trump and are NOT labor friendly). We are all holding our breath waiting for the Federal Services Impasses Panel. The Union believes that any decision made by this panel will be disastrous to the Union.

With all the above unknowns, where do we go from here? What would I, as Council President, like to see us do? I promised to have *budget transparency*. We are not there yet. We have asked the right questions, we have National doing an audit. The Council 220 Executive Committee will then vote on a budget which will set many of our priorities for this year. I promised to *improve communications* between the Council and our locals. Also, we have talked through our Council 220 newsletter UNITY to get on the same page with them and start working on our next issue. We have spoken to our Council's webmaster about updates and have added a page with the pending Council level grievances. http://www.afgce220.org/?zone=/unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=Council20Grievances

My Most Immediate Concern Is The Contract. If SSA's proposals are adopted by the FSIP, the following bad things will happen to employees: changes in leave approvals; changes in the appraisal system; changes in what management has to consider for merit promotions; change in awards; changes in Telework. And lots of issues will NO LONGER BE grievable. If SSA's proposals are adopted by the FSIP, the Union won't have official time to do representation; won't be able to take LWOP to do representation when official time is denied; can't use representatives who are not current active SSA employees because SSA has the right to refuse to deal with them. That means we can't use retirees; we can't use outside lawyers; we can't use AFGE employees like National Reps or AFGE attorneys.

We are currently working with the AFGE-SSA General Committee (the umbrella group of Unions which represent other parts of SSA such as OQA, OHO, DOC, HQ and the PSCs), as well as AFGE National about various options if we lose at impasse. I am trying, and luckily I am not alone; there are many Local Presidents like Edwin, as well as the other 6 active members of the Executive Board and 10 Regional Vice Presidents to help assist so that we can fulfil the promise of Council 220: The bottom line is this, I would like to encourage all of you to hang in there! Regardless of what happens, the Union will keep fighting! We have faced tougher times in our history, this will NOT stop us! Thank you for your support!

It Pays to be a Union Member

By Jeremy Lannan, National Vice President of Women and Fair Practices



Jeremy Lannan (left) NVP Women's Fair Practice, Jennifer Ramirez (center), Vanessa Barrow (right)

It is with great pride that I tell you as your National Vice President of the Women's and Fair Practices (WFP) Departments of AFGE how rewarding it is to be a union member. My role is to oversee both Departments including EEO Representation by our WFP EEO Attorneys and implementing our Social Justice Programs such as AFGE YOUNG, AFGE PRIDE, and our Conflict Resolution Program. As an AFGE Member and through your Local Leadership, you can request to have your EEO Case sent to WFP to be reviewed by one of our WFP EEO Attorneys and possibly accepted for direct legal representation. This is one of your benefits by being an AFGE dues paying member.

Did you know that there are also many other benefits and discounts that you and your family members receive just by you being an AFGE Member?

Some additional examples would be: travel discounts, pet discounts, home and auto buying programs, free legal consultation for legal matters outside of the workplace, and the list goes on and on.

In fact, I have recently used two of the many AFGE Membership benefits and saved over \$5262.08, just by being an AFGE Member. I saved \$262.08 through AFGE's Auto Care Plus Program where I received a significant discount at Firestone for the purchase of 4 new tires, having my rotors turned, and having my wheels balanced. Before using my discount as an AFGE member, I was provided an estimated quote of over \$600.00, but I only ended up paying \$338.92 for all the work I received through Firestone. The savings more than covered my dues for the year!

I also most recently enrolled in AFGE's Free College Benefit Program and I just began my 2nd semester towards accomplishing an associate's degree through the 2-year Paralegal Program that Eastern Gateway Community College offers via online. Guess how much I am paying out-of-pocket for this degree? If you guessed \$0, then you are correct! That's right this benefit is designed to prevent any out-of-pocket expenses for you and your family just by being an AFGE Member. There are just 4 easy steps you must follow: Enroll at Eastern Gateway Community College, Apply for FASFA, submit your transcripts (HS Diploma, GED, etc.), and then sign up for your classes and counselor.

Now I know you may be wondering which family members are covered by your AFGE Membership Benefits. Well by Family Members, they could be your husband, wife, children, mother, brother, sister, cousin Auntie, Uncle, or even grandkids. As long as you consider them a family member, then they are also eligible to use your AFGE Membership Benefits through you as the AFGE member. If anyone would like to know more about WFP and the services that we provide to our AFGE Members, please contact us at 202-639-6417 or you can email me directly at Jeremy.Lannan@afge.org. If anyone would like to know more about AFGE's Membership Benefits and how you and your family can save, please contact our Benefits Coordinator at the Toll-free Benefits Line: (888) 844-2343 or you can visit www.afge.org





WHY THE UNION IS IMPORTANT

- ◆ We are the checks and balances of Labor Management Relations
- ◆ We ensure the Agency follows the contract, Federal Statute and Regulations/EEOC Policies and procedures
- ◆ Promote and protect the best interests of SSA employees Bargaining Unit
- ◆ Organize, educate and mobilize members
- ◆ Negotiate renovations, office relocations, etc.
- ◆ Ensure and offer member benefits such as life insurance, short-term disability, dental, education, and much more!
- ◆ We are your exclusive representative in all labor contract matters
- ◆ Lobby for higher wages and improved healthcare, protecting health benefits and ensuring Federal Employee recognition
- ◆ We are your first-line of defense in matters concerning discrimination, retribution—retaliation and whistleblowing
- ◆ Promote a healthy work environment free of high levels of stress, discrimination, hostility, and bullying

Should I file a Grievance or EEO complaint?

Working in an agency that is unfortunately not free from discrimination can be demoralizing and make you feel like you don't have options. One thing your union wants you to know is you do not have to allow yourself to be a victim. Because of federal statute and the collective bargaining agreement between SSA and AFGE, you have the option of filing a grievance or an Equal Opportunity Employment (EEO) complaint. The question is: which one should you file?

Local 3369, under the preeminence of President Edwin Osorio, strongly recommends you file a grievance and this is why: While it is true that the first three steps of a grievance are held directly with the Agency, and the decision is also rendered by the Agency, the process is far quicker and if you have a solid complaint, you will go before a neutral fact finder (in this case an arbitrator) far quicker. At the present time EEO complaints are taking 3-5 years to go before a judge. A grievance can go before an arbitrator within a year. In addition, a grievance has the lower burden of proof than an EEO complaint. With a grievance, you must prove that it was more likely than not that the Agency acted in a discriminatory way against you; with the proper laying out of facts, you have a good chance of winning with an arbitrator. With an EEO complaint, you not only have to state your facts on the particular discriminatory act, you have to prove that the misbehavior happened as a result of you belonging to a protected class such as: race, gender, religion, nationality, disability, ETC. What this means is that even if all the facts are on your side, if you cannot prove you were treated discriminatorily because of your affiliation with a protected class, you lose and the Agency wins.

On average, federal employees win about 3% of all EEO complaints brought against the agency. When you compare that to the average 60% of cases that are won by the Union on behalf of its members, it sounds like a no-brainer doesn't it? And the number of successful EEO complaints will probably drop in the future because of understaffing at the EEOC. The EEOC has a severe shortage of judges hearing EEO complaints. This shortage of judges will only be exacerbated with the most recent budget cuts to the administration's 2020 budget cuts. The truth is that if anyone tells you to file an EEO complaint instead of a grievance they are not telling you the whole story. The good news is that if you don't have all the information you need, the Union is here to help you.



H. R. 1534

LETS PUSH TO PASS 12 WEEKS PAID PARENTAL LEAVE FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Background: This bill was introduced 03/09/2019 by
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney

This Bill provides us with 12 Weeks of Paid Parental Leave.
We need more Members of Congress to Co-Sponsor

We are asking the following from YOU

1- Contact your Member of Congress
(If you don't know who your Member of Congress is please call 311)

2-Let them know you are a Constituent and Federal Employee

3-Ask them to Co-Sponsor Bill HR 1534 Which gives Federal
Employees 12 Weeks of Paid Parental Leave

4-Let them know that this Bill is different from others since its
specifically for Federal Employees

5-Let them know that although there are some states and cities that
offer Paid Parental Leave— WE FEDERAL employees get NO PAID
PARENTAL LEAVE because we are FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.

6-Check back at www.congress.gov search for HR 1534 and ensure
your Member of Congress co-sponsored the bill.

7-Tell a friend or Family Member to follow steps 1-7

Together we can ensure Federal Employees get PAID PARENTAL
LEAVE!

To provide that 12 weeks of family leave made available to a Federal employee shall be paid leave, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 5, 2019

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York (for herself, Ms. NORTON, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. CUMMINGS, Mr. CONNOLLY, Ms. BONAMICI, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mrs. BEATTY, Ms. WEXTON, Mr. HOYER, and Mr. BEYER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Reform, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To provide that 12 weeks of family leave made available to a Federal employee shall be paid leave, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the "Federal Employee Paid
5 Leave Act".

L3369 Shows Solidarity during Government Shutdown to TSA Workers.

January 19, 2019- AFGE Local 3369 showed solidarity to Brothers and Sisters who were affected by the Government Shutdown earlier this year. L3369 funded a Lunch and Learn for AFGE Local 2222 TSA employees at JFK Airport in Queens. At this event TSA officers were provided free Subway Sandwiches courtesy of Local 3369 and food bags containing non-perishable items/canned goods for them and their families. Special guests included Vanessa Barrow 2nd District YOUNG Coordinator and Dawn Jemine-Garcia Treasurer of Local 862 and Brendan Griffiths Chief of Staff of New York Central Labor Council. Congressman Gregory Meeks attended the event in support of Federal workers and was receptive to their stories. The story was covered by Jeff Yapalater from TSA Airport Voice.



(left) Congressman Gregory Meeks shows his support for federal employees.



Do you believe harassment and bullying exists in your office?

This is what you need to know.

As privileged employees of the greatest anti-poverty program in U.S. history, SSA employees serve millions of Americans every year. The vast majority of people we serve are people that are struggling with their health; living with financial hardships, and are compromised enough that they seek our help. And even though we serve them graciously and with pride, it is getting more challenging every day when we are faced with a growing antipathy from the Agency that alienates us from the work we love to do.

Ever since the unsuccessful emergence of three presidential executive orders designed to make it easier to fire federal employees and restrict the Union's ability to represent them, there has been an exponential rise in the number of reprimands/suspensions/terminations being prosecuted against SSA employees. What's even more prevalent is the number of employees being subjected to harassment or a hostile work environment. Not only does this have a severe effect on your ability to serve the public, it has compromised your health and safety in the place where you spend the majority of your time. Moreover, the Agency has done little to nothing to recognize the impact adverse and contentious comportment has on the quality of your life, or how it diminishes your productivity.

One of the Agency's problems is that it has a harassment policy that is futile. It is the Union's belief that the HPO is simply in place to say that it has one. In reality, it seldom finds harassment and it is completely ineffective at preventing hostile work environments from demoralizing employees. One of our Asks to Congress was to look into the idea of creating an independent body that would oversee the current HPO. This is something that Local 3369 intends on pursuing vigorously through all available avenues.

Congressman Adriano Espaillat attends our Women Empowerment Gala

Our 2nd Annual Women's Empowerment Event took place March 15, 2019 at the Bronx VA Hospital, hosted by Treasurer and Member at Large for National AFGE YOUNG Committee Jennifer Ramirez. The Event was well attended with special guests NVP Vincent Castellano, Women and Fair Practices NVP Jeremy Lannan, Chair of the AFGE National YOUNG Committee Jim Rihel. New York State Senator Alessandra Biaggi wrote a letter which was read to kick off our celebration. U. S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat closed the event and spoke passionately regarding the contributions of Women in society and in the Labor movement. Bronx Times reporter Miriam Quin covered the event which was published in Bronx Times latest edition on page 44.



AFGE Local 3369
c/o SSA
138-50 Barclay Avenue
Flushing, NY 11355

Contact Info:
Edwin Osorio Local President
Edwin.Osorio@ssa.gov
Eobass4@aol.com

Jennifer Ramirez Treasurer
Jennifer.S.Ramirez@ssa.gov
JenniferRamirezAFGE@aol.com

Union Office Mailing Address
C/O SSA
138-50 Barclay Ave
Flushing, NY 11355
Tel: 718-661-2310
Fax: 718661-2309

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