

AFGE



AFGE Local 2823

Newsletter

Issue 8 – April 2026

chief editor: Cecelia Gray, president

Upcoming Events

We will be hosting our first monthly in person meeting on Wednesday April 22nd in room 1373 and via Zoom. If you're in the building, please join us!



Welcome back everyone! It is so good to be back in the building. Stop in and say hello. We're room 1249 directly across from the old store on the 12th floor. Let's get to work!!!

Membership Meeting

Reminders:

1. Monthly meetings are held every 4th Wednesday from 11:30am - noon
2. You must join the meeting during your lunch break! No excluded time is ever allowed.
3. Log in only on your **PERSONAL** device, MUTED!
4. Your full name (how it appears on your VA email) must be displayed to remain on the call for local confidentiality. If you need instructions, please go to ZOOM.com or see the January meeting minutes for the link.
5. We continue to have issues with callers not muting their devices. Those callers will also be removed from the call so that we can continue to conduct business in a timely fashion.





Want to (re)join:

Go to: www.AFGE.org

Click the E-Dues tab at the top of the page (third from the left)

Select:

“VA” – Veterans Administration

L2823 – Cleveland Ohio VARO

Click continue

Complete the form in its entirety. The BUS CODE is 1272’

Click the box next to “I want to join...”

Enter your full name on the next line (you will see the date automatically populated).

Draw your signature in the large box.

Click ENROLL

**Dues are \$23.21 per pay period and will be deducted from the account you designate on AFGE.org.

**Create an account while you’re there so that you can take advantage of the benefits of the membership.

**Once you complete this process, please be sure to provide Amy Lauria (amylauria@ymail.com) with a personal email address and cell phone number so that you can be included in the local’s correspondences.

Thank you for joining the local and standing with us in the fight!

*****No one should be on agency deductions for risk of double deductions.*****

Local Updates:

As we get back on track, the local is busy understanding the changes that have been going on at the regional office. We realize those changes bypassed the union. We are in the process of requesting that information so we can demand to bargain those changes!

Any arbitrations, grievances, etc. that were pending prior to the collective bargaining agreement being illegally revoked will be reinstated.

We are looking at going digital which is a huge undertaking. The move revealed how difficult and costly it is to retain paper records and equipment. As such, except for those activities such as arbitrations and some financial reporting, we will be operating electronically going forward. Little by little, we will look to move older records to hard drives.

Jim and I will be traveling to Indianapolis for sixth district elections on the first weekend in May. Upon our return, the merger of the Indianapolis local will be underway.

Centralized Human Resources is currently working on updating employees’ codes. The administration released an executive order to change all employees to “at will”, so you may have seen an updated SF50 to change your BUS Code. That code should be updated by the upcoming pay period. It is a manual activity, so it may take a bit more time. If you do not see it updated with a new document uploaded into your personnel file by the next pay period, please contact your HR specialist to inquire.

Our bylaws require that we have a budget committee and an audit committee. We are looking for volunteers to participate on these committees. You must be able to come into the office to complete these duties. We are also looking for stewards. Training will be provided. Ideally, we would love to have a steward in each division that understands the work. It is required that you are performing at least at fully successful in your VA standard and not have any conduct issues in the last year. If you are interested in any of these roles, please contact a member of the executive board.

The executive board has transitioned back to the union office located in room 1249. Office hours are based on what is required for the local, so if you need something, it is best to contact a member of the executive board, the chief steward, or one of the stewards listed at the bottom of the newsletter.

Reasonable Accommodations:

I know many of you have questions. What happened? Why do I still have to come in three times a pay period? I thought RAs were being called back. These are all valid questions and statements.

The back story of the employees being called back into the office was that when COVID hit, Cleveland's management team told its people to go home. The world literally closed. When it was time to come back the agency told employees that you can request an RA and it would not be scrutinized. So many employees applied and were approved with "disabilities" that may be accommodated some how in today's world.

The executive order said that every employee should return to work and telework was revoked for all agencies. Cleveland was and still is an exception because we were undergoing construction and had given up several floors based on that construction. We did not have the capacity to seat everyone; hence, the huge exercise of "hoteling" Joe Grasso went through to figure out when and where employees would sit.

If you're on an RA and you've read your document, it should state that you must recertify annually. Cleveland did not do the annual recertifications. They were getting scrutinized for not doing so; hence the emails that RA had to return to office, initially, March 2026. When the word got out, it was rumored those of us not on RAs would have a reduced obligation of in office reporting days. Some employees requested due process meetings with the director's office which went unanswered. As a result, the report date was then pushed back to June to accommodate the due process meetings.

It was later determined that other offices with the same seating limitations as Cleveland were not being scrutinized, so the decision to have RAs return to the office were pulled until next year.

PIPs

If you were previously on a PIP and did not complete it successfully, you may be placed on a new PIP which will now be in accordance with the Master Agreement. You will be allotted 90 days whether production or quality. Be sure that you exercise your Weingarten Rights. You are allowed to have union representation especially when there is discipline involved.

PIPs are a fresh start. Just remember that once you go on a PIP, you cannot have the same issue for an entire year from the date of inception as a repeat offense can include up to termination. Use this time to ask for all the training (in writing) that you need. Use your resources. You should have time with an assigned QRT employee or a seasoned/journey level employee. Be sure to also use your time with your coach to communicate your needs.

Transaction Report/WAH/Flex

VSC uses a report called the transaction report to monitor how long an employee is idle. The norm for a VSR is about an hour without a transaction. The norm for an RVSR is about 2 hours without a transaction. This does not mean that you will not be questioned about your time; however, that is typically the amount of time that will potentially keep you off the radar.

What to expect? Your coach will have a conversation with you about your idle time. You will be expected to explain the time you are not producing work and/or the time you are away from your desk/showing AWAY.

Reprimands for conduct up to and including termination can follow if your name continues to show on the weekly reports.

Please be aware that the agency can see where you are logging in. If your WAH agreement states your alternate workplace is 123 Main St. Anywhere, Ohio; however, you are logging in at 456 Elm Street Everywhere, OH, you are violating your WAH agreement. If you are not returning from breaks and lunches on time, you can be charged with AWOL. Coaches are spot checking as well. If you've found a way to keep your TEAMS light green or even red, and your coach sends you a message and you fail to respond, there could be disciplinary action if the behavior becomes a pattern. I would encourage you to carefully read your WAH agreement and remember it is a privilege.

Lastly, some time back, your coach may have asked for your tour of duty. If you provided a 6am to 2:30pm tour of duty, that is what you are expected to work. If you need to work a later tour of duty, please notify your coach so the work can be managed properly.

Government equipment:

National VA Council (NVAC) has recommended that we continue to use personal emails and devices to conduct union business because privacy cannot be guaranteed. Please do not use VA emails or computers to conduct any union business or make any inquiries.

Member Benefits:

AFGE members can take advantage of a debt settlement program. Many federal employees may be struggling to keep up with rising costs considering federal employees suffered through a government shut down at the start of the fiscal year, now facing rising costs of food, gas and other consumer products. If this is you, the debt settlement program may be beneficial for you and your family.

This program:

- helps members eliminate debt faster by negotiating with your creditors on your behalf
- allows members to pay off outstanding debt with a monthly payment that is lower than their current monthly payments
- provides members with referral to other Union Plus programs that may be better suited to the member's financial situation than debt settlement

Benefits include:

- Free debt evaluations and options
- Ability to settle debt for less than the amount owed
- Flexible, low monthly payments
- Debt free in 24 to 48 months
- Members can call and talk to a Certified Debt Consultant seven days a week for assistance
- If the Debt Settlement Program is not appropriate for the member, Freedom will refer the member to another Union Plus provider.

Please visit AFGE.org for more information.

President's Corner:

First and foremost, I want to thank each of you for standing with AFGE through some of the most difficult times I believe any of us have ever seen. I know it was not easy to stand strong, especially seeing many of our brothers and sisters walking away when times got hard, but when you are on the right side of the law, you will prevail and prevail we did. National VA Council (NVAC) fought long and hard to win this battle and they continue to fight to ensure ALL of our rights under the law and the best contract are restored and our jobs are safe! The fight is not over. There is still work to be done.

Secondly, I want to thank you all for entrusting me with your local. I've been working for this local for almost as long as I've worked in this regional office. I am a strong believer in unions because my family has been for as far back as I can remember. I've seen how important unions are for employees. It's sad to think unions are needed for federal agencies...but here we are!

A little about me for those of you who may not know me...I started my career with the VA regional office in March 2008 as a VSR. I was promoted to RVSR in April 2011. In April 2015 I was promoted to A Decision Review Officer when legacy appeals was still on station. When DROC was created, I transitioned to a Rating Quality Review Specialist. I started with the union in 2011 as a steward and at some point, was appointed secretary. I've served as secretary since that time. I've also served on multiple committees as the union representative which included: EEO as a co-chair, AES, labor management, safety, end of year performance award reviews, women's and fair practices coordinator, elections, and a host of other assignments. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Finance and have a Master of Business Administration. Prior to VA, I worked in the automotive industry for General Motors as a District Manager in the New York, New Jersey area and Ford Motor in the Detroit Metro area. I've worked for a residential home builder managing their design centers in the Tampa/Jacksonville Florida regions. Lastly, I worked in the banking industry here in the Cleveland area. Imagine that..working in an industry that correlates to my undergraduate degree. I have two lovely daughters, one of whom will graduate this year from Gilmour Academy. The other who will finish her nursing degree next year. I am married to my high school sweetheart. I am also a proud member of the illustrious Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

My vision is to see this local thrive and operate in accordance with our established bylaws. With that in mind, it will take some grit, dedication, and hard work. I am looking for some dedicated people to help rebuild our local stronger, with even louder voices, that runs like a well-oiled machine. Let's get our membership numbers higher than ever before. Let's encourage every member to join our monthly calls to hear what's going on. Lastly, go to the website to get updates when you cannot join the meetings or just to see what's new. There are some big plans underway. Having said that, if we expect this local to thrive, we can no longer expect a small group of people to do all the work. NVAC has done the work in the courts. You've shown the agency that you are AFGE STRONG by maintaining your membership! Join in...let's continue the momentum by doing the work at the local level.

What's up and coming? Jim and I will be traveling to Indianapolis the first weekend in May for sixth district caucus. As mentioned in the last meeting. Our local will be absorbing the Indianapolis local. Once we return from the caucus, the work will begin. With this, we expect to increase by about 100 or so members, increasing our voting strength!

We are back in our space. The move was grueling, and there is still work to be done. I want to personally thank the executive board, support services, and Anthony Swartz, steward, and Zachary Brogan, steward, for helping us through this. If you need anything when you are in the building, feel free to stop in. Our offices hours vary. We are still trying to work through some things with the agency (the fight is not over). We are in room 1249, directly across from the old store on the 12th floor. You will begin to see some relevant correspondence once our board goes up near the office. Please also visit our website (www.afgel2823.org). We are in the process of getting it updated. You can go there to see past and present information, union stewards, our board members, and miscellaneous information. Here is where you can also see how to get involved. We need YOU!

In Solidarity,

Cecelia Gray, President
AFGE, Local 2823

AFGE LOCAL 2823

President: Cecelia Gray

VP: James (Jim) Swartz

Treasurer: Daphne Coleman

Secretary: Amy Lauria

Chief Steward: Key Pickings

Steward: Zachary Brogan

Steward: Alicia Gajdos

Steward: Anthony Swartz

AFGE Local 2823: www.afgel2823.org