



AFGE Local 2823

Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 1, August, 2024

Chief editor: Cecelia Gray, secretary

Upcoming Events

With the end of the fiscal year quickly approaching, we want to reiterate the importance of documenting concerns you may be experiencing and requesting training. If you are not meeting your standards, please be sure to email your coach, with a cc to your personal email address and ask for the specific training you require sooner rather than later. Please also keep a tally of all the systems interruptions (WATRs, VBMS, etc.) that impact your ability to complete work timely. The local has a better chance at helping with production issues rather and quality, so please be very intentional about keeping track daily!

Exercise your right! No matter who you support, please go out and VOTE! Local and state elections are just as important as presidential elections because they impact your daily lives more closely. Up to 4 hours of administrative time is allowed. Please contact your coach with your request closer to election day.

Inside This Issue

Welcome to the inaugural edition of AFGE Local 2823 monthly newsletter. Look for informative updates and exciting new announcements in each edition. If you have a special announcement: promotion, retirement, birth of a child, or something labor related and appropriate for this audience, that you would like to share, please send an email to: CECELIAGRAY71@GMAIL.COM no later than close of business the first Friday of the month. Depending on the volume, we may not be able to include everything, but every attempt will be made. If you are interested in writing for the newsletter, please contact Cecelia Gray at the aforementioned email address.

We are also looking for a tech savvy person(s) who would be interested in managing our social media sites. If you are interested in putting your talents to work, please contact Cecelia Gray at the aforementioned email address. The local is putting together standing committees to take the burden off the few who work to keep the local functioning. We are in need of volunteers for: audit, elections, legislative, and budget. These roles are completely voluntary and the tasks will have to be completed on personal time because it is for the good of the local. If you are

Membership Meeting

Local 2823 is moving to a new platform for our monthly meetings. This platform will allow members to finally put a face with a name and voice. If you choose not to participate "live", please consider an appropriate and current picture. Please refer to the email sent by Secretary Cecelia Gray for instructions. See you soon!

Lunch & Learn

The local is planning to begin hosting lunch and learn sessions for our members. These informal sessions will give us a chance to get to know our members a bit more personally and provide opportunity for questions and answers that we may not have time to address in our monthly meetings. Stay tuned for more on the lunch and learns.



interested in volunteering or returning to the committee you have previously served, please contact Cecelia Gray. We would like to have these committees in place within the next 60 days.



43rd AFGE National Convention



The executive board traveled to Las Vegas the week of August 19th where we spent time working on new resolutions to amend the national AFGE constitution and bylaws. The highlight of the convention was the election. President Dr. Everett Kelly (pictured center) was re-elected National President of our illustrious federation. Eric Bunn, Sr. (pictured on the right) was re-elected National Secretary Treasurer. Welcome newcomer Dr. Kendrick Roberson (pictured on the left), who replaces Jeremy Lannan, as National Vice President for Women and Fair Practices.

The convention also voted to increase dues to support increasing costs. The last dues increase was in 2014 and the federation has struggled to keep pace with rising costs and inflation. We will see a \$.50 dues increase each year for the next three years beginning in 2025. At this time the local is unsure as to how this will trickle down to each member, but more information will be forthcoming as soon as it is finalized.

Benefits corner

Did you know that membership has its privileges? As a member of AFGE, you can tap into a host of different benefits that can save you money during this challenging times. With school back in session, this edition's featured benefit will focus on education. As a member you or your family member can apply for the AFGE Union Plus Scholarship. Amounts range from \$500 to \$4000. This one-time award is for study beginning in the fall. Students may re-apply annually. Applications are due by noon (eastern time) January 31st. Applications are available beginning mid-June each year for the following calendar year. Applicants are evaluated according to academic ability, social awareness, financial need, and appreciation of labor. A GPA of 3.0 or higher is recommended. Recipients will be notified by mail the first week of June. You can find the application on [AFGE.org/member benefits](https://AFGE.org/memberbenefits). You must log in and membership information will be required.

Who are we?

Please allow me to introduce the staff of Local 2823:

James (Jim) Swartz, President: (440) 667-8262

James, more affectionately known as Jim, was hired in the late 1990s as a registered nurse (RN) at the VA medical center. Jim transferred to the regional office (RO) in 2001 as a Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR) and later promoted to Decision Review Officer (DRO). Jim became active with the local in 2002 due to the large number of indiscretions going on at the RO. Jim has held the office of steward, chief steward, and president. Jim followed the guidance of his dear dad who always encouraged him to "Don't get angry, get involved", which is the reason Jim decided to serve in the United States Army, his city as councilman and now our local where he works hard every day for every member. Jim recently testified in front of Congress to discuss the issues we are facing locally. He is a certified mediator and Master Agreement instructor.

Dwayne Walker, Vice President: (216) 704-7362

Dwayne began his career with the VA and his membership with the local more than 20 years ago. Dwayne started his VA career as a File Clerk, later promoted to Claims Assistant, Veterans Service Representative, and now Ratings Veterans Service Representative. Dwayne has served the local in the capacities of: Steward, Chief Steward, and now Vice President. Dwayne is a disabled Veteran and certified mediator who enjoys serving the

local and fighting for employees' rights.

Daphne Coleman, Treasurer: (216) 849-0687

Daphne came to the VA 37 years ago. What an accomplishment! Her career began in Loan Guaranty. She was later promoted to secretary where she served in Loan, Adjudication, and the Veterans Service Center (VSC). Daphne currently works as an authorizer in VSC. She joined the local in 1987 where she volunteered as a steward, later elected to Sergeant of Arms and currently treasurer. Daphne is also a certified mediator.

Cecelia Gray, Secretary: (216) 256-5060

Cecelia was hired as a Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in March 2008 where she served until April 2011 when she was then promoted to Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR). Cecelia proudly served in that capacity until she blazed the trail to becoming the first black woman to be promoted to Decision Review Officer at the Cleveland Regional Office in April 2015. Cecelia joined the local in 2011 after being egregiously overlooked for promotion. She has served as steward, Women and Fair Practice Coordinator, secretary, and is a certified mediator.

Stewards:

Keyamonte Pickings, Chief Steward, along with Dwayne Walker, VP, is the centralized point of contact for employees' concerns; however, we have trained stewards that can also assist you with things such as: supervisor meetings, discipline, PIPs, and/or anything that does not fall in line with our master agreement: ([VA-AFGE-2023-Master-Agreement.pdf](#)). Please see below for a list of stewards:

Alicia Gajdos: (216) 659-3709 (VSC)

Anthony Henry: (440) 479-4259 (LGY)

Tommy Stewart: (216) 965-5291 (VSC)

Anthony Swartz: (440) 221-8891 (NCC)

Keyamonte Pickings, Chief Steward: (330) 957-6564 (VSC)

President's corner

The local is looking to move to greater heights, but we need your help. For those who may not be aware, there are a lot of issues the local is focused on: rapid and constant change in the Veterans Service Center (VSC), relocation of the union office to the temporary swing space (located across from the store on the 12th floor), master agreement training, and an upcoming arbitration for VIP mentors. Last but certainly not least, VSC issued letters of concern for employees not meeting performance standards.

The local is very engaged with the constant changes in the VSC. Often times these changes are made without local bargaining, which cannot happen. We have to depend on our members to keep us informed to changes the agency makes that may impact how we work. So, to quote our director, "If you see something, say something." We are entitled to bargain such changes, so please keep us in the "know".

As you all know, the building has been under construction for some time. We have now moved to our temporary space located on the 12th floor just across from the store. If you are in the building and are in need of anything, please reach out to a steward or someone on the executive board (e-board) for assistance. We are still working out the kinks with GSA for the door locks, so access may be limited until further notice.

A word to the wise: please DO NOT remove any equipment from any workspace. Continuing this behavior will impact the entire RO and result in assigned days in the office with assigned seats. Please, if you need anything, reach out to your coach and/or IRM. Do not relocate or take anything from a workspace.

We are going into arbitration #2 for VIP mentors. Although the arbitrator ruled in the union's favor in the first arbitration, the agency filed an appeal at the last minute, and we are still awaiting the ruling from FLRA. Even though we are still awaiting that decision, the second arbitration must go on and is scheduled for mid-September. If you were impacted, you may be contacted to be a witness in the case. For those who testified in the first arbitration, job well done. Your solidarity is top notch!

If you received a letter of concern, know that there was a 90-day acclimation period from April 21, 2024 through July 21, 2024 for the new standards. The local is aware and is working with the VSC Front Office to get things rectified. Please stay tuned.

Please consider getting involved. There are a few committees that require volunteers: budget, audit, legislative, and elections. The executive board has worked hard in the past to complete all the duties as outlined by our bylaws and constitution; however, this work is not sustainable. As we continue to grow, please consider volunteering some of your time to ease the burden of the few that work hard to serve the local.

Until next time....THERE IS POWER IN NUMBERS!

AFGE LOCAL XXX Union Officers

President: James Swartz
VP: Dwayne Walker
Treasurer: Daphne Coleman
Secretary: Cecelia Gray
Chief Steward: Keyamonte
Pickings

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