



AFGE Local 2823

Newsletter

Issue 9 – May 2026

chief editor: Cecelia Gray, president

Upcoming Events

We will be hosting an open house during our May monthly meeting for ALL bargaining unit employees. Lunch will be provided! See you all May 27th at 11:30 am.



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.



Another Win!!:

If you recall, on March 13, 2026, Judge DuBose, 9th circuit court judge, granted a preliminary injunction forcing the agency to reinstate our union collective bargaining agreement (CBA). This injunction allowed the local to return to the office and begin working for you again. The agency immediately filed a plea for emergency relief from this injunction. The First Circuit Court of Appeals, in a unanimous decision, upheld the preliminary injunction! Kudos to our National VA Counsel (NVAC). If ever you were unsure about how your dues were being spent...this speaks volumes.

In solidarity!!!!

May Madness:

The local is currently running an incentive where members can recruit new members and each (member and recruit) will receive a \$50 rebate at the end of the incentive. The incentive runs from May 1, 2026, through May 31, 2026. The local will host an open house on May 27th during our regularly scheduled monthly meeting. This meeting will be open to ALL bargaining unit employees. Please spread the word!!

REMEMBER: IF YOU SIGN RECRUIT A NEW MEMBER, YOU MUST SEND AN EMAIL TO DAPHNE COLEMAN FOR PAYMENT TRACKING PURPOSES.

HOW TO 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@gmail.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:

The merger with Indianapolis is underway. AFGE national is in the midst of processing the paperwork. We will be traveling to Indianapolis soon to meet the new members and agency partners, conduct new steward training, and finalize the merger.

The executive board will be getting recertified as mediators in the month of May. This certification will assist the local in working through some of the concerns that arise with the agency.

The local has filed a grievance concerning annual leave requests. The agency is requiring employees provide reasons for taking annual leave. Additionally, we've learned that employees cannot take leave for systems issues without a ticket, no matter how little the outage. Lastly, the old "provide your holiday leave requests now". We are asking that the agency immediately rescind aforementioned changes, the employees receive an apology, and notification be posted that the changes have been made based on past practices.

The executive board will be traveling July 30, 2026, through August 4, 2026, for mandatory financial officers training.

Bargaining unit employees (BUEs) who were detailed to coach positions were returned to their positions May 15, 2026. These coach details were illegally offered to BUEs.

Our budget has been updated. We will bring it forward for members to vote in June since May will be an open meeting. Stay tuned. Remember, if you are willing to volunteer for the budget and/or audit committee, please let a member of the executive board know. This is not a "heavy lift" ..meaning not a lot of time is required for these committees. Our bylaws require that we have a budget committee and an audit committee. 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 minimally at fully successful in your VA standards 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.

PIPs:

Performance improvement plans (PIP) have begun to roll out. The local will be sitting in on the consultation meeting which will be then followed by the PIP implementation meeting on or about the next day.

Recommendations:

1. Ask for your data to be presented by month NOT "clumped" together (for example: January through April)
2. If you know you are struggling with something specifically, come to the meeting with that issue and ask for that additional training
3. If you have a medical condition that you feel is impeding you from being successful AND you've already spoken to your coach about the issue, come to the meeting prepared to speak about it...especially if you have a reasonable accommodation in place or pending. Medical documentation is helpful.
4. If you are close, advocate for yourself!
5. You should have received a letter of concern prior to a PIP proposal resulting in extended reviews, if not, ASK for extended reviews!
6. Use your weekly mentoring sessions wisely.
7. Use the QRT mailbox (according to the mailbox criteria!! See your coach for the criteria.)
8. Be prepared for your biweekly coach sessions.
9. PIPs CAN be extended according to the master agreement Article 27 Section 10(B). ASK if needed!

You will be allotted 90 days whether a production or quality PIP. 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. You must successfully complete the PIP **AND** you cannot have the same issue for an entire year from PIP implementation. **PLEASE KEEP THAT IN MIND!**

BUS codes

Everyone should have received an email notifying you that your BUS code has been changed from 8888 to 1272. This means that you are no longer an at-will employee and your union rights have been reinstated as of March 13, 2026. Please log into your personnel folder and check your SF50 and/or your pay stub to ensure your code reads 1272. If it does not, please contact your point of contact in human resources. Arryl Bolden or Kelly Bartnicki are the HR assistants and should be able to provide the correct specialist for the division in which you work.

Transitioning out?:

Friendly reminder: If you are retiring or terminating your employment with this agency either by choice or otherwise, please contact the local. It is imperative that you let us know you are leaving this office for a couple of reasons:

1. If you are retiring, we will classify you as a retiree and no further dues will be deducted.
2. If you are transitioning into another agency and wish to continue with their local, we can transfer your membership so that you do not have a break in service with the union.
3. If you are leaving all together, we will discontinue your membership so that you are no longer charged dues.

We cannot reimburse dues that have been paid because you've failed to notify the local that you have left the building.

Keep in mind, contractually, you are obligated to remain a member until you are within 10 days of your anniversary date if you do not meet the criteria. AFGE requires us to verify that you meet the criteria above before we can release you. We've received some "colorful" correspondence regarding this matter; however, we have to follow the rules provided to us so that we are in compliance with AFGE's national financial office. Your understanding is greatly appreciated!

Member Benefits:

Are you interested in advancing your education? AFGE is partnering with The EBS Network to offer their discount program. EBS offers discounts on 150 plus programs to you and your family members for a variety of certificates and degrees. You can earn a certificate, associate, bachelor, or master's degree while attending either part of full-time.

Some of the schools include: Claremont Lincoln, Franklin University, Fisher College, Oral Roberts, and Albright College. The institutions offer coursework like cybersecurity, business administration, medical billing, engineering, construction management, human resource management, Master of Business Administration and much more.

Get started by:

- Request your match at: www.ebsunioncollegebenefit.org/AFGE
- Get matched to an in-network higher education institution that aligns with your educational goals
- Get contacted by an admissions counselor to talk through next steps

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:

The first six weeks has been likened to a baptism by fire! It was expected, considering the circumstances in which I took office. My phone rings well beyond my tour of duty. Emails and text messages come when members are in need. That is what I signed up for. We have a long road ahead of us and I'm here for it all!

I've heard the song and dance about the agency being thrilled to have the union back; however, in the words of our most recent past president, Jim Swartz...“DEEDS, NOT WORDS”! I'd like to say that all things are done according to the Master Agreement, but my mother did not raise a liar. It grieves me to see firsthand what goes on in this office. It grieves me because some of those offenders were once in the shoes of impacted bargaining unit employees.

Last edition, I spoke about my vision. It saddens me that no one has stepped up to volunteer for not one opportunity yet when trouble hits...Some may take offense to that, but what you all will quickly learn about me is that I don't mind speaking the truth even when it's the hard stuff! There is no “I” in TEAM. This local cannot see the success I know it can on the backs of those listed below. I understand work at home (WAH) is our biggest obstacle; however, keep in mind those that sacrifice to help in you in your time of need. So again, I am looking for some dedicated people to help rebuild our local stronger, with even louder voices, that runs like a well-oiled machine.

If you simply cannot volunteer, consider recruiting new members...joining/attend in person the monthly calls to see what's going on with YOUR local. 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. Donate time on your lunch break. There will be times copies will need to be made for arbitrations. There is always something that can be done in the office.

If you are a 100 percent WAH member, consider managing our social media presence. We need a member who is willing to create and manage our local's social media pages which can be done at home and anytime!

What's up and coming? Jim has begun the process of going digital. The last move revealed how dated we really are. Huge opportunity!! As I mentioned last month, Indianapolis will be coming under our jurisdiction. The paperwork is underway as I write. The bylaws have already been updated. You will all have an opportunity to meet them soon. More to come so please stay tuned.

We are still working with the agency for the shadow box (imagine that). We do have a new banner that has been hung outside of 1249. Please visit our website:www.afgel2823.org. It has been 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

Steward: Tommy Stewart

AFGE Local 2823: www.afgel2823.org