



# AFGE Local 2823

## Newsletter

Issue 6 – March 2025

chief editor: Cecelia Gray, secretary

### Upcoming Events

There were no February minutes due my involvement in the recent arbitration. The newsletter will provide a high-level overview of the meeting. If you have additional questions about what was discussed, please contact the local.

**NOTE:** PLEASE DO NOT SHARE UNION BUSINESS WITH NON-DUES PAYING MEMBERS. WE ARE JUST LIKE AMERICAN EXPRESS....MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES. Beyond that, it is not fair for those who support the efforts of AFGE with their hard-earned dollars to have their privilege abused. Please be considerate of your brothers and sisters.



**Current members:** If you have not already moved your dues deduction to eDues, DO IT NOW! Your membership depends on it. You will automatically be dropped from agency paid allotment and your membership will cease in the next few days! Please contact: James Swartz, Cecelia Gray, Daphne Coleman, or Keyamonte Pickings for assistance; otherwise, the link can be found at [AFGE.org/eDues](https://afge.org/eDues). Reminder: Our Local is 2823, Council is 262, bargaining unit status 1272.

### Membership Meeting

#### Reminders:

1. Monthly meetings are held every 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday from 11:30am - noon
2. You must join the meeting on 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 in order to remain on the call for local confidentiality. If you need instruction on how to, please go to [ZOOM.com](https://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.



## PIPs

Performance improvement plans (PIPs) were implemented beginning the week of March 24, 2025. Traditionally, PIPs are a 90-day plan designed to assist the employee with a “fresh start”. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) released a memorandum dated March 27, 2025, in response to the most recent executive order that now states that PIPs will last only 30 days. What does that mean for those that are currently on PIPs? We have not received a definitive answer just yet. We certainly hope employees will get the 90 days outlined in their PIP.

This is a difficult time to have to face a PIP either way, but now that we are here, we have to try and make the best of it. Each employee has been assigned a QRT mentor or a seasoned R/VSR and should be allotted one hour daily to meet with their mentor. It is up to the employee to reach out to their mentor daily to ask questions, seek guidance, etc. Please use that time to your advantage because the agency will use it against you if you are not successful. During this 90-day period, you should also be meeting with your coach to review your progress. If you are finding that you are not progressing, ask for the specific training, IN WRITING.

Under normal circumstances, PIPs are not such a negative tool; rather, they should be viewed as a tool to help get an employee back on the right track as long as they are managed properly. A bit of transparency..even though a PIP concludes after 90 days, the employee cannot get into the same trouble they found themselves on an PIP for up to one year after the PIP concludes. So, for example, if I am PIP'd for production, I have to meet production for one consecutive year post-PIP; otherwise, discipline can and will follow that can include termination. As such, it is imperative that employees treat PIPs with the utmost care and concern and stay in close touch with their mentors and coaches.

## 714 Letters

What is a 714 letter? 38 USC 714 “supposedly” states Congress gave VA special authority to remove employees for poor performance without a PIP and any conduct issue without due process. This certainly is untrue and unlawful because we have the master agreement in place to protect employees from such egregious actions. These were the same letters that costs employees their jobs in President Trump’s last administration. VA council is filing a lawsuit to fight this action. So more to come on this issue.

Please remember how federal jobs are being threaten and all that we are facing now when it is time to vote!!

## Housekeeping....again

I’m sure you all are beyond tired of seeing the reminders and hearing me ask. If you’ve been on the calls, then you understand the request. We have but a short amount of time to try and relay information to our members without disruption/distracton. It makes it difficult for others to hear when lines are not muted and the call has to continuously be stopped to ask participants to please mute and/or identify themselves.

Thank you so kindly in advance for your support!

### REMINDERS for ZOOM meetings:

- You must **ALWAYS** identify yourself on our ZOOM calls with first and last names as they appear on your VA email address; otherwise, you will be dropped from the call. We have to protect the business of the local. Additionally, this is our attendance record. If you have questions about how to format your name, please to go ZOOM.com PRIOR to the day of the meeting. Union officials are unable to stop the meeting/what we are doing to assist you because it takes us away from what we are assigned to do during the call.

- Please MUTE your personal device before you log into the call; otherwise, you will be dropped from the call. It is distracting and makes it very difficult to conduct business with background noise. Please be respectful.
- Do not use government equipment to discuss union business. We will not respond. It puts yourself and the person you are communicating with at risk. Our contact information can be found on our webpage.

## Reduction in Force?

The same said OPM memorandum dated March 27, 2025 discussed on Monday's call (OPM memorandum dated March 27, 2025, titled: Guidance on Executive Order - Exclusions from Federal Labor -Management Programs) speaks to this administration to terminate the covered agencies (VA is listed) collective bargaining agreement (CBAs) obligation when undertaking reduction in force (RIFs). In lay terms....covered agencies should just do whatever they'd like.

Article 28 in the master agreement speaks directly how a RIF "should" work. As we all know, this administration has been creative in how they go about their workings. Keep in mind that contract law supersedes executive orders. So how the master agreement is written is how the RIF should be handled. As employees, we should know our rights. The local just wants everyone to be well informed with good information that can be verified, so that we don't worry about things that don't matter.

There are so many questions that remain unanswered. Some folks are plugged into the media, some social media, some hear by way of friends of friends. Either way, it is absolutely unnerving for us all! The recently leaked memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) outlines implementation memo gave us a glimpse of what's to come, but the worst part about it beyond the unknown, is the waiting. What a nightmare to know that we may not have a job, but to boot, the near daily emotional interruptions that come our way.

## Return to the office/In office day

As many agencies have returned to the federal building, keep in mind that it may be a bit more challenging to find parking and ultimately get into the building with the sheer number of employees returning.

Some employees have already returned full-time, while others are due back in April and the remaining due back May 5, 2025.

We are obviously still facing capacity concerns with seating. It will be up to the agency to determine schedules, seating assignments, etc., so please stay tuned for that information.

As recent as this past week, the news has reported that our building is closing/sold within the next three years. The director's office responded with an email that neither confirmed nor denied the rumor. Where is this all coming from? We don't have the answer to that, but this list came from somewhere...Stay tuned!

Reminders:

Please be mindful of, at minimum (we all know that AI can hear us as well...), written communications on your government equipment that includes, but not limited to: TEAMS and TEAMS meetings, emails, etc. We've been notified that software has been installed to track/monitor keystrokes, search queries, written communications, and documents edits. This goes for home and in-office. Telework and remote work allows for government equipment to be inside of our homes, so it's best to shut down completely at the end of your workday.

When you come into the office, it is for a full day. You are no longer allowed to leave, travel home and finish your workday there. That privilege was revoked by the agency some time ago.

Be careful with scheduling leave/calling off on your scheduled in-office day. That can and will be considered a trend.

The agency can get you for conduct which is difficult to defend. Don't place a target on your back unnecessarily in such difficult times. If you need to be off on your regularly scheduled in-office day, consider switching, or taking half a day, but don't make it a habit.

Remember, when you scan your badge at the security check point, that information is kept. That data can and will be used if the agency chooses to.

The agency can also determine where you are logging in from. So if you end up on their radar for whatever reason and they look, don't say you weren't warned!

## Am I Still a Member?

If you have not moved to eDues, the agency will drop you from biweekly allotment in the very near future. What this means is that if you are not paying due via eDues, you are no longer a union member and have no union protections. You will have to re-enroll with AFGE.org/eDues. Please sign up TODAY!

## Local Updates

- Dwayne Walker is retiring from the VA March 31, 2025; however, will remain in his role as vice-president of the local for the remainder of his term.
- The prior local supplement dated October 1, 2014, rolled over and will run concurrent with the August 8, 2023, master agreement.
- Monthly meetings are now held every 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday from 11:30 am – noon.
- You will be receiving notifications from our Broadstripes system, in the near future, to disseminate important information. It is a system our national AFGE leaders created and should not be considered spam. This system will be used in conjunction with continued emails from our local. Stay tuned.

## President's Corner

The saga continues. We are still fighting to protect employees. I have heard rumors that VBA will investigate removing 4300 VBA employees. This is to be done by RIF or whatever means necessary. These are just rumors, but...Now is the time to act. Call and write your representatives! Tell them how you expect them to represent you, not the whims of the party. Be sure that you are on your own time, and own equipment.

My concern is for those who are on performance improvement plans (PIPs). In the past, if people were making significant progress, they would extend the PIP, my guess is that they will not be allowed to extend PIPs. I am also guessing that if anyone should drop in their performance within the year since the beginning of the PIP, they will be let go. These are my concerns, and I do not have any evidence one way or the other.

I also received word that DOGE has had the VA add tracking programs to the computer systems. Every key stroke, Teams message, emails, and meetings will be recorded and kept. They will then use AI technology to look for key words, phrases, and speech to identify employees who may not be loyal to the cause. Please make sure that any form of communication that is not 100 percent VA business is not done on government computers or phone.

It is my opinion that we have gone beyond the extreme. I have nightmares of being chained to the desk with armed guards making sure that we keep our heads down and silently perform above and beyond duty to serve the state. Any infraction will be met with swift and extreme punishment. For those who are old enough to remember, Pink Floyd, "The Wall" movie comes to mind.

Our Local is working with friend in Congress and the Senate to stop HR-2249.

[HR-2249](#) is a bill that passed the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. It allows an incoming President to disavow any existing collective bargaining agreements (CBA) with unions representing federal employees. The bill amends Chapter 71 of Title 5 of the United States Code to provide the President with expanded discretion in negotiating and modifying collective bargaining agreements.

It still has a way to go but is moving forward. It is vitally important to contact your representatives both in Congress and the Senate to stop this. The Union is the only thing that is standing in their way of a hostile takeover of our lives, employment retirements, and benefits.

This administration is hell bent to cause as much disruption as possible. We must maintain our resolve and hold our representatives responsible for their decision to protect the party over the people. Again, go on their websites and tell them how you feel. Have friends and family members do the same! Solidarity has not meant so much for this generation as it does now.

We have been "invited" by Congress to again provide testimony on the National Work Queue. This will take place on April 9, 2025. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. We've just got to hope it's not a train!

In Solidarity,

Jim  
James R. Swartz, President  
AFGE, Local 2823





### AFGE LOCAL 2823

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

#### AFGE Local 2823

Phone: (216) 522-3530 x 3021

Fax: (216) 522-2484

[www.afgel2823.org](http://www.afgel2823.org)