

The New Jersey VOICE of Higher Education



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Chris M. Junior | AFTNJ

From the President's Desk

Welcome to the relaunch of the *New Jersey Voice of Higher Education Labor*, the official newsletter of the Council of New Jersey State College Locals, whose purpose is to keep members informed, engaged, and united.

As your new president, one of my goals is to increase communication and collaboration throughout Council and among the locals. If you have a suggestion for the newsletter, please submit it [here](#).

New Jersey's public higher education system is at a crossroads. Campus closures and consolidations are happening across the country, and we are already seeing changes here at home. The next eighteen months will bring a new governor, a proposed Task Force on Higher Education Governance and Funding ([Bill S3771](#)), and a new round of contract negotiations.

In the face of these challenges, your union leadership remains

vigilant. We are actively involved with the Kean-NJCU merger process, making it unequivocally clear that our objective is to safeguard members' jobs and uphold fair labor practices. Simultaneously, we are fighting against the recently mandated SHBP cuts, joining a statewide coalition to defend your healthcare and collective bargaining rights.

Your engagement is crucial — now more than ever. The "No Kings" rally exemplified your collective power and commitment to fighting for what's right. I encourage you to participate in upcoming events (p. 4), contribute to our [Higher Ed Survey](#), and [sign up for COPE](#).

YOU are strength of your local and the CNJSCL. Together, we will navigate these changes, ensuring that the interests of higher education and organized labor remain at the forefront.

Emari DiGiorgio

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United Against SHBP Cuts: CNJSCL Joins Statewide Union Coalition to Defend Healthcare and Collective Bargaining

New Jersey's recently enacted FY2026 budget includes a mandate to achieve \$100 million in cost savings within the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) by June 2026. The CNJSCL joined public-sector unions across the state, including AFTNJ, AFSCME New Jersey, CWA District 1, and Rutgers AAUP-AFT, to express opposition and to call out the governor and legislature for attacking our healthcare and violating our collective bargaining agreement.

Union leaders and rank and file members from Montclair, Ramapo, The College of New Jersey, and Stockton attended the Assembly Budget Hearing on June 26th and the Assembly Session on June 30th, and members from all 11 Locals made calls to their representatives voicing their concern.

As written, the budget requires the SHBP Plan Design Committee (PDC), which includes both state officials and union representatives, to submit cost-saving proposals with "actuarially verifiable savings" for the first half of 2026. If an agreement is not reached by December 1, 2025, the legislature or the Governor's representatives can jointly select cost-saving changes.

This new process, which requires the PDC, the legislature, or an arbitration panel to be involved, violates the negotiated process outlined in the CNJSCL's collective bargaining agreement.

Following the vote, Emari DiGiorgio, President of CNJSCL, said, "With today's budget passage, Governor Murphy has betrayed dedicated state workers and educators, forcing thousands of dollars in healthcare costs onto their and their families backs. We will not forget this attack; our fight for fair contracts and affordable healthcare continues."

On July 1, 2025, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-Middlesex) released an official statement on the FY26 budget: "Last week, we learned the State received \$200 million in additional unanticipated revenue. And although I firmly believe New Jersey's public worker health plans need significant reforms to control costs, the funds allow us the opportunity to find ways to reduce those costs, while treating workers fairly. To that end, the Assembly will hold hearings on public worker health benefits in July and monitor any potential premium increases and their impact on public plans."

In the coming weeks, as part of the statewide healthcare coalition, **CNJSCL will be advocating for a corrective bill to restore the \$100 million cut to the SHBP. Prepare to call your legislators and wear your AFT blue at the statehouse.**

The first meeting of the SHBP Plan Design Committee was scheduled for 10am on July 9, 2025. Updates forthcoming.



SIGN UP FOR COPE

Members who contribute to the Committee on Political Education (COPE) understand the importance of politically engaging candidates and elected officials in the struggle of the labor movement. This fall, COPE plans to focus on Get Out the Vote activities to ensure the governor and legislature center the interests of higher education and organized labor.

Fill out a [COPE membership card](#) TODAY to start or to increase your contribution. The minimum deduction is \$.50 per pay period.



CNJSCL Vows to Protect Jobs & Rights Amidst NJCU-Kean Merger

On May 15, 2025, Kean University and New Jersey City University (NJCU) took the next step toward their merger by formally signing of a letter of intent. Leadership from the Council of New Jersey State College Locals (CNJSCL), AFTNJ, NJCU Local 1839, Kean Federation of Teachers Local 2187, and Kean Adjunct Faculty Federation Local 6024 were in attendance, underscoring organized labor's immediate engagement in the process.

A month prior, CNJSCL and Local leadership met with Kean President Lamont O. Repollet, establishing a foundational commitment to transparency, collaboration, and student welfare in Hudson County.

From the outset, the CNJSCL and its member unions have made it unequivocally clear: their paramount objective is to safeguard members' jobs, uphold fair labor practices, and ensure that this merger, and any future reorganization within New Jersey's public higher education system, strengthen rather than undermine its core mission.

"As the Local President of AFT 1839, I remain committed to ensuring that the jobs of NJCU

union members are protected throughout this merger process," affirmed Local 1839 President Bill Calathes. He stressed that while approaching discussions with optimism, the union will "continue to advocate for our members' rights and livelihoods every step of the way." James Castiglione, KFT President, echoed this resolve, stating, "Protecting jobs, ensuring a robust faculty and staff role, and centering the public good... are principles that will guide our approach." Marie Krupinski, former KUAFF Local 6024 President, emphasized the "duty" to support dedicated union members, confirming KUAFF's solidarity with all impacted Locals.

To this end, leadership from the three impacted Locals and the CNJSCL have been meeting regularly, strategizing and identifying key priorities. As NJCU and Kean University establish their transition teams, the Locals will ensure robust labor representation, actively working to uphold contractual rights and ensure a smooth, just transition for all members. The CNJSCL is fully committed to vigilance and advocacy, assuring members that their interests will remain at the forefront of every discussion and decision throughout this merger.

LAST CALL FOR HIGHER ED SURVEY

Please share your insights to help shape how we collaborate with and advocate for the eleven locals that the CNJSCL represents.

👉 [**Click here to take the survey.**](#)

CNJSCL leadership is committed to promoting solidarity over competition among institutions and using your feedback to inform constructive, forward-looking solutions for NJ Higher Education.



AFTNJ and AFGE Lead "No Kings" Rally

On June 14, 2025, AFT New Jersey and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) held a "No Kings" rally near the Lyons VA Medical Center in Lyons, New Jersey, drawing hundreds of union members and advocates to protest federal spending priorities and champion veteran welfare. AFTNJ President Jennifer S. Higgins highlighted how the \$45 million allocated for an Army 250th anniversary parade in Washington, D.C. could be better utilized to serve the critical needs of veterans. The unified voice of AFTNJ, AFGE, and other community organizations underscored labor's commitment to fighting authoritarianism and supporting veterans and working class Americans.



Photo collage | Montclair Adjunct Faculty, Local 6025



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: SIGN UP TODAY!

Join AFT New Jersey on August 6, 2025, for a full-day mass mobilization training featuring presentations led by representatives from AFT national and the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey.

For more information and to register, click [here](#).



SIGN UP FOR GOOD TROUBLE!

On July 17, 2025 — five years after the death of civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis — communities nationwide will come together for the Good Trouble Lives On day of action to peacefully challenge injustice and creative meaningful change.

- Date: July 17, 2025
- Time: 11am - 3pm.
- Location: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. statue, (495 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Newark, NJ 07102)

For more information and to register, click [here](#).

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Local 1904 | Montclair

Local 1904 has been busy and proactive over the past few months, with the negotiations team hard at work securing important agreements and improvements. Recently signed agreements include the following:

Primary Election Voting Accommodation for Professional Staff and Librarians

This agreement permitted Professional Staff and Librarians to take one hour at the beginning or end of the workday to vote in the primary election on Tuesday, June 10th, 2025.

Teaching Faculty Early Promotion Agreement

This agreement acknowledges the service of long-time non-tenure track faculty and offers them an opportunity to apply for promotion from Associate Teaching Professor to Full Teaching Professor outside of the reappointment cycle.

Concurrent Tenure & Promotion to Professor Agreement

This agreement affirms an Associate Faculty member's right to apply for promotion to Full Professor and tenure simultaneously.

The new **Summer Continuity Agreement** reflects the updated Summer 2025 assignments, with a 3.5% increase applied to last year's rates. This agreement ensures that the negotiated annual across-the-board increases will continue to be applied each year.

All agreements can be found under **Contracts and Agreements** on the 1904 website.

Local 2364 | TCNJ

Local 2364 engaged members in a ten-month process to draft and ratify a new constitution, incorporating extensive feedback from various committees, reading groups, and general membership meetings. This culminated in the unanimous ratification of the new constitution at the May 21, 2025, general membership meeting.

Local 2364 also negotiated several notable **local agreements**:

MOA 151: Modification of Disciplinary Standards for Assistant Professors hired from Visiting Professorships modifies scholarly expectations for assistant professors previously hired as Visiting Professors, addressing an inequity in their tenure clock by accounting for their limited scholarship opportunities during their visiting status.

MOA 152: The Position of Twelve-Month Clinical Specialist/Lecturers (NTPPs) establishes new 12-month Clinical Specialist/Lecturer positions to support TCNJ's expanding online and global course offerings, ensuring fair working conditions with provisions such as a 30 TCH cap, dedicated course development time, and 22 annual vacation days.

MOA 154: Modifications to Scholarly Expectations to Accommodate External Events allows for modified scholarly expectations for pre-tenure faculty whose work is significantly disrupted by unpredictable external events, such as changes in federal funding or ideological attacks on disciplines, and establishes a transparent process to ensure faculty can still achieve tenure despite unforeseen disruptions to their scholarly work.

Local 2275 | Stockton

Local 2275 hosted its 2nd Annual Multi-Union BBQ on May 22, 2025, and over 260 members from SFT 2275, AFT 6025, CWA, IFPTE, and the local police unions attended. Though former CNJSCL President Tim Haresign had a respectable ride, this year's winner was SFT Membership Chair, Seth Carver.



This spring, SFT 2275 negotiated a **Tuition Waiver Program for Adjunct Faculty and Their Dependents** that supports adjunct faculty and their dependents, including spouses, partners, and children. Eligible adjunct faculty will be granted a fixed waiver of up to 10 credits per year, prorated based on their current teaching workload. All local agreements are found **here**.

Additionally, from May 16-18, 2025, SFT 2275 joined the striking New Jersey Transit Operating Engineers on the picket line in Atlantic City, sending a message to the NJ Transit Authority Administration that they must return to the negotiating table and offer our union siblings a fair contract that keeps their wages competitive with other railroads in the Northeast.



LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Local 2187 | Kean

Local 2187 has been working on several local agreements this past semester and recently signed **LOA 179: Professional Staff - Funds for Professional Development**. This new agreement provides professional staff with an opportunity to apply for up to \$1,000 annually for professional development opportunities related to their university employment. This funding can support a wide range of professional development, including but not limited to certification, fees and travel expenses for conferences and trainings, professional organization membership, software, and/or subscriptions.

Local 1796 | Paterson

This past spring, Local 1796 finished negotiations on an **Assigned Release Time (ART)** agreement. The ART Program, which will resume in 2026, aims to support tenured and tenure-track faculty members in their research, scholarship, and creative endeavors by providing them with release time from teaching duties.

Local 1796 has also been triaging WP Administration's interpretation of the statewide agreement regarding advancement to the 13th step. Though the language for advancement is identical to that for the 12th step, WP is insisting on a new process evaluating performance. Local leadership has firmly advocated against this interpretation, hosted several workshops to assist those eligible for advancement to the 12th and 13th steps, and worked with CNJSCL leadership, staff, and counsel to file a charge.

Local 2373 | Rowan

During the spring semester, Local 2373 negotiated a new **Non-Tenure Track Teaching Faculty Promotion MOA**. This agreement outlines the promotion process for Non-Tenure Track Teaching Faculty at Rowan University, establishing clear criteria and procedures for promotion to Associate Teaching Professor and Teaching Professor. It details the requirements for teaching excellence, professional development, and service, along with the application calendar and necessary forms.



THE HEAT IS ON: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

As New Jersey experiences increasingly intense summer heatwaves, the CNJSCL wants to ensure members are aware of critical safety measures and their union-backed protections. Our collective bargaining agreement includes provisions designed to ensure a safe working environment.

If you believe your working conditions are unsafe due to excessive heat, contact your local union leadership, who can help clarify your contractual rights, assist in formally reporting concerns, and advocate for necessary adjustments, such as temporary relocation to a cooler area, modified work duties, or access to cooling stations. The CNJSCL and your local union leaders are committed to upholding the health and safety provisions of our contracts, ensuring that all members can perform their duties without risking their well-being during the summer's heat. Stay safe, stay hydrated, and know your union leaders are here to support you.



Have a feature idea or
update for the **VOICE**?

SUBMIT CONTENT HERE.

A Warm Welcome, a Fond Farewell



Sarah Sirju
Accountant & Financial Advisor

It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce myself as the new Accountant and Financial Advisor supporting the important work of the Council and its member unions. I bring with me over a decade of experience in accounting, nonprofit financial management, and strategic advising, with a deep passion for serving mission-driven organizations. Based in New York, I've built my career supporting small businesses and nonprofits across the tri-state area, with a focus on sound financial stewardship, compliance, and sustainable growth. My approach is grounded in clear communication, forward-thinking strategies, and a commitment to making financial data not only accurate, but actionable. I've learned that great financial leadership isn't just about numbers—it's about helping organizations like yours thrive in their advocacy and operations. I look forward to collaborating closely with the Council, its affiliates, and leadership to ensure fiscal integrity, transparency, and continued organizational success.



Carol Itskowitz
Accountant & Financial Advisor

After 32 years, I am officially retiring! It has been both an honor and a privilege to work alongside the Council and with so many of you throughout the years. My journey began in 1993, when I was hired by Marco and Bobbie Lacatena as they prepared for their own retirements. Since then, I've had the opportunity to work with Presidents Don Silberman, Nick Yovnello, Tim Haresign and Emari DiGiorgio, as well as Treasurers Mike Searson, Burt Wailoo, Muroki Mwaura, and Mike Heller. Much of what I learned about the labor movement and union work came from a dedicated and talented staff—Tom Wirth, Barbara Hoerner, Bennett Muraskin, Lynell Feniak, Steve Young, Debra Davis, Bruce Howard, Anthony Giardullo, and Susan Ryerson. I've had the privilege of working with countless Council Exec members, supporting Treasurers, and assisting Locals in navigating financial challenges. I supported staff during negotiations and organizers during the formation of the Adjunct unit. These were meaningful milestones in our collective efforts. Thank you for a rewarding, meaningful, and memorable career.



The CNJSCL is hiring a part-time Staff Assistant and Membership Coordinator to manage union membership operations, provide high-level administrative support, and assist staff representatives in their legal, contractual and grievance matters (mostly remote with in-person as needed). For a full list of qualifications, responsibilities, and application materials, [view the job description here](#).

Screening of applicants begins July 1 and continues until filled, with a preferred start date of Aug. 1. Applications should be sent to: jobs@cnjscl.org.



Tara Luke
Local 2275

My name is Tara Luke and I'm the new President of the Stockton Federation of Teachers (SFT) AFT Local 2275. I've been Executive Vice President of SFT for the past three years, and I've been a member of the local negotiating team for eight years. I was able to participate in our most recent round of Statewide Negotiations as well. I've been a faculty member in the Biology Program at Stockton University since 2004 and specialize in using molecular biology and bioinformatics tools to answer questions about marine ecosystems. I'm looking forward to taking on this new challenge!

New President Spotlight



Leonard Grayson
Local 6024

As of July 1, 2025, Mr. Leonard Grayson assumed the presidency of Kean University Adjunct Faculty Federation AFT Local 6024, succeeding Mrs. Marie Krupinski. Grayson brings extensive experience to the role: three years as 1st Vice President, ten years as an adjunct professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Public Policy, and four decades of union involvement. He previously negotiated contracts and improved Local 6024's social media. Outside of his union leadership, Grayson's advocacy includes serving as past president of the Elizabeth Chapter of the NAACP, co-founding Union County Operation Warm Heart, and creating the City of Elizabeth's Municipal ID program and Office of Reentry. He also helped establish the KU Reentry Research Team. As President of 6024, his priorities are increasing union membership, securing better adjunct compensation and conditions, and preparing for the NJCU merger. He will launch a "Monthly Coffee Hour" in August 2025 to foster adjunct engagement.

COUNCIL OFFICERS

Emari DiGiorgio, President
Dina Boero, Executive Vice President
Mike Heller, Treasurer
Laureen LeFever, Vice President
Ana Wetzel, Secretary
Alex Sperling, Rep. for Professional Staff
Samantha Kennedy, Rep. for Librarians
Mary Wallace, Rep. for Adjunct Faculty & President, AFT Local 6025
Laura Field, Rep. for NTTP & President, AFT Local 1904
Susanna Tardi, Legislative Rep. & President, AFT Local 1796
Joseph Basso, President, AFT Local 2373
William Calathes, President, AFT Local 1839
James Castiglione, President, AFT Local 2187
Leonard Grayson, President, AFT Local 6024
Tara Luke, President, AFT Local 2275
Charlene Martucci, President, AFT Local 4277
Ed Shannon, President, AFT Local 2274
Matthew Wund, President, AFT Local 2364

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