



**SEIU 517M**  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

*The* **E-Former**

The Official Electronic Newsletter of  
SEIU Local 517M

**May 2023**

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Click on the map to find out which Region your unit is in.



### May is Public Service Recognition Month

Beginning nationally in 1985, the first week of May has been set aside as Public Service Recognition Week, a time to thank dedicated public servants from federal, state, and local governments across the country.

In Michigan, we couldn't agree more with acknowledging our amazing public employees but believe one week is not enough to capture the depth and scope of the services our members provide.

With that in mind, SEIU Local 517M is proud to celebrate the hardworking, talented, intelligent public servants we represent. Their dedication deserves to be acknowledged.

As a public sector union, SEIU Local 517M knows firsthand the importance of public employees and has championed their resilience, professionalism and expertise.

From scientists and engineers to paraprofessionals, road commission crews, unemployment insurance examiners, technicians, librarians, city employees and more, we appreciate your hard work and sacrifice.

As we celebrate Public Service Recognition Month, we would like to highlight our members. [Please use this link to share your story.](#)

### Scholarship Application Period Closes May 26!

The deadline to submit applications for the SEIU 517M - Tomorrow's Michigan Today Scholarship is quickly approaching. The Scholarship is open to dues-paying members in good standing, their spouse, children, step children, adopted children or grandchildren with college or trade school expenses.

There are 15 scholarships available and the amount of each scholarship is \$600. These non-renewable scholarships will be awarded to students based on successful completion of the application process and meeting certain criteria. Awards will be made via a lottery system from all eligible submissions.

Applications are now available. [Click here.](#)

**STAND TOGETHER — STAND STRONG**

[www.seiu517m.org](http://www.seiu517m.org) [Facebook at: SEIULocal517M](#)

## Last Month to Register for the 2023 Scholarship Golf Outing!



Our annual golf outing to raise money for the SEIU 517M Tomorrow's Michigan Today Scholarship Fund will be held on Friday, June 9, 2023 at Wheatfield Valley Golf Course in Williamston. Check-in begins at 8:00 a.m. with a shotgun start at 9:00 a.m.

The outing's proceeds help fund scholarship awards for SEIU Local 517M members and their family members. A link to the scholarship application and rules can be found in the article below.



The cost is \$80 per player which includes 18 holes of golf with a cart, lunch at the turn, BBQ dinner after the round with burgers and jumbo hotdogs, prizes, a donation to the fund, a card for a future round of golf at the course, and more!!!

[Download the Registration Form!](#)

Get your foursome ready, and join us for a great day of golf to support a great cause! Contact Dave Corrie at (517) 267-2090, or e-mail at [corried@seiu517m.org](mailto:corried@seiu517m.org) with any questions.

**The registration deadline is June 2nd so reserve your spot today!**

## Birch Run Schools Cafeteria Workers Serve Up Success at the Bargaining Table

Submitted by Clint Bryant, Region 1 Labor Relations Representative

Members at Birch Run Area Schools were excited to begin their contract campaign centered around economic justice. For too long, other food service workers in the area were seeing bigger increases and better terms of employment, yet the food service staff's dedication was unwavering.

During this contract campaign, members were focused on the big picture and were willing to work hard to reach a fair agreement. "I told Clint I am not a good talker but I would do my best," said Unit President Donna Roe. "We also had some team members who were afraid to sit at the table with management".

Negotiations with the District proved successful. The unit was able to reach a tentative agreement with the following:

- Improved the PTO retirement payout to \$2,500.
- Increased flexibility for medical reimbursement submissions.
- Improved Bereavement Leave.
- Doubled the PTO carry over cap.
- Three additional snow/Act of God days.
- Added a Holiday (Thanksgiving).
- Increased Life Insurance Benefit from \$7,500 to \$25,000.
- Medical Reimbursement increases.
- Increased longevity.
- 8 percent wage increase with a third year wage opener.

One member of the bargaining team members exclaimed "I feel like a person, these negotiations actually made me feel like a real person".



L-R: Unit President Donna Roe, Bargaining Team Member Shelly Leach

Congratulations to the bargaining team and members at Birch Run Area Schools on their hard fought and well-deserved success at the bargaining table. The school board intends to ratify the agreement at their May 12, 2023 meeting.

## President Combs Published in Detroit News

Local 517M President Joey Combs wrote the following article for the Labor Voices section of the Detroit News that was published April 18, 2023.

### **Labor Voices: Public workers keep government services going**

When newly elected officials take office, people often take for granted that government services will continue to be provided seamlessly. That continuity is only possible because of the institutional knowledge and hard work of dedicated public employees. From our schools to our county governments to state services, as leadership changes hands and priorities shift, public employees ensure governmental transitions are smooth and the public can count on the resources and services they need.

Year round, public service employees repair and maintain our bridges and roads, keep our water and parks clean and safe, and provide many other critical public services that power our communities. As we head into Public Service Employee Recognition Month, Michigan leaders should take the opportunity to recognize and support the essential public workers who support us.

In the early days of the pandemic, scientists in state health labs worked long hours in stressful conditions to process the very first COVID cases and help our state navigate the crisis. When schools shut down and learning went virtual, our paraprofessionals in Flint and Saginaw and across the state stepped up to support our kids and their families.

As union president, alongside my fellow union leaders, I worked nonstop in those first months—fielding calls from some members who risked their lives in frontline jobs. We helped our members navigate health and safety concerns and fatigue. Their fierce commitment to serving their communities was incredible to witness. Yet, some public sector workers have not received compensation or even acknowledgement for their efforts and sacrifices.

Ultimately, our failure to value and recognize these workers hurts our state, as low pay or lack of recognition has caused many to leave the field in search of higher paying private-sector jobs.

A recent report by Michigan Public Policy Survey shows that 60% of Michigan's local governments are having trouble with employee recruitment and over one-third are concerned with employee retention. Without proper staffing, it is hard to provide the quality of services that the public deserves.

What makes this more troubling is the fact that historically, public sector jobs have been a major contributor to greater economic security for Black and brown workers. Indeed, 44% of Black public sector workers own their homes, compared to 28% in the private sector. Studies show the racial wealth gap within public sector jobs is smaller than in the private sector. It is clear that public sector jobs not only support our communities, but they also are an important part of promoting racial justice.

Public service jobs must remain good, family-sustaining jobs that lift up entire communities. We can take steps now to address these issues and help relieve some of the toll that the pandemic has taken on hard-working public employees. Last year, Michigan legislators introduced a bill to provide "public employee recognition pay," which did not move forward. Legislators should reintroduce this bill and pass it to show these public servants that Michigan values all they have done.

Through uncertainty, crisis and change, public service employees give their all to ensure our communities have the resources and services they need to thrive. Let us not take that for granted. Next month and every month, Michigan should honor and recognize the resilient and dedicated public employees who keep us going.

*Joey Combs is president of SEIU Local 517M, which represents over 7,000 public sector employees across Michigan. A union member for almost 20 years, Joey has served as president since 2018 and also serves on the board of SEIU Michigan.*