



**SEIU 517M**  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

*The* **E-Former**

The Official Electronic Newsletter of  
SEIU Local 517M

## March/April 2024

### Staff Directory

Please contact the appropriate staff person using their phone or email (click their name) below:

**Interim Executive Director:**

[Joey Combs](#) - 517.267.2065

**Information Services/PDF/Member-Only Discount Benefits:**

[Dave Corrie](#) - 517.267.2090

**Office Manager:**

[Ashley Konyha](#) - 517.267.2095

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**SOM Labor Relations Questions:**

**Scientific and Engineering Unit:**

[Howard Gordon](#) - 517.267.2070

**Human Services Support Unit:**

[Janice Cosey](#) - 313.246.1137

**Technical Unit:**

[Kevin Karpinski](#) - 517.267.2088

**School & Local Government Labor Relations Questions:**

**Region 1:**

[Clint Bryant](#) - 989.797.4258

**Region 2:**

[Christine Stressman](#) - 616.696.2141

[Andy Johnson](#) - 269.978.1994

**Region 3:**

[Lamont Williams](#) - 313.314.6511

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



### Steward Training Back After COVID

The annual SEIU Local 517M Steward Training hasn't been held in person since 2020. That changed Saturday, March 9th and Sunday, March 10th when 95 members assembled at the AC Hotel in Lansing to hold the 2024 SEIU Local 517M Steward Training.

A variety of topics were covered and included member engagement, grievance preparation, and New Employee Orientations. We recognized our Steward of the Year award winners. There also were presentations on AFRAM, COPE and Organizing.

Attorney Marshall Widick (pictured right) gave an informative presentation on Saturday about grievance handling and best practices, the Duty of Fair Representation, and the SEIU Code of Ethics.



Sunday was filled with unit break out sessions to address the individual needs of our three state employee units and all the School and Local Government members.



School and Local Government members work on a grievance exercise during the Sunday breakout sessions.

**STAND TOGETHER — STAND STRONG**

[www.seiu517m.org](http://www.seiu517m.org)



State employee breakout sessions on Sunday.

Upper Left: Human Services Support Unit.

Above: Scientific and Engineering Unit.

Left: Technical Unit.

Saturday night entertainment after dinner was a selfie photo station and a round of Trivia. The winning trivia team was named “Better Late Than Pregnant” and consisted of Ronda Brandimore, Corey Gage, Mathew Mendez, Debbie Walker, John Walker, and Matt Ward.



## 2024 Scholarship Applications Now Available



The SEIU 517M - Tomorrow’s Michigan Today Scholarship is open to dues-paying members in good standing (as defined in the SEIU Local 517M Constitution and Bylaws),

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.

2024 Scholarship Applications are now available. [Click here.](#)

## Thank You SEIU

Below is a note we received from 2023 scholarship winner Sophia Lozmack

*Dear SEIU 517M,*

*Thank you very much for the \$600 scholarship to help further my education. I am currently a junior at the University of Akron studying Respiratory Therapy. This scholarship will be helpful because my program is year-round my last two years.*

*Thanks again,*

*Sophia Lozmack*



## Stewards and Leaders of the Year

At every Annual Steward Training, we recognize stewards and leaders that have gone “above and beyond” for their membership over the preceding year. Below are the 2024 Stewards/Leaders of the Year.

The School and Local Government Region 1 Stewards of the Year are Patti Colpean-Decker and Mary Beth Keenan-Reams. Both work for Saginaw County Community Mental Health.



For 27 years, Patti Colpean-Decker has served Saginaw County. Her position at Saginaw County Community Mental Health has uniquely positioned her as a vital component to improving the mental health of children and families in our community. Patti is a trailblazer who volunteers for the union by regularly recruiting members and other leaders, attending employer board meetings, Labor Management Meetings, serving as a Region 1 Board Member, Unit Bargaining Team Member, and Unit Steward.

She is being presented with her award from Labor Relations Specialist Clint Bryant.



Mary Beth Keenan-Reams began serving the unit three years ago as a Unit Steward. Since then, she has stepped up to fill the vacancy as the Unit President. In addition, she has served as a bargaining team member, By-Laws Committee and Unit Secretary. She is a unionist at her core. Mary Beth is a skilled negotiator and remarkable leader who always puts the needs of others first. Often a little stern and very sarcastic with management, she pulls no punches when it comes to representing her membership. She speaks truth to power, with a smile.

She is being presented with her award from Labor Relations Specialist Clint Bryant.

The School and Local Government Region 2 Steward of the Year is Mason Guritz from Kalamazoo Public Schools.



Mason is in his second term as Unit President of the Kalamazoo Schools Custodian unit. Mason works at the Community Education Center of the Kalamazoo Public Schools system. After the former leaders of the Kalamazoo School Custodian unit retired, Mason stepped up and took over as Unit President. He has adapted well to the responsibilities of the Unit President. Mason was instrumental in getting the Kalamazoo Public Schools to end outsourcing of custodial services, which has allowed the union to bring in 22 new employees under SEIU representation. His representational work has been outstanding.

He is presented his award from Region 2 Divisional Vice President Yolanda Johnson.

The School and Local Government Region 3 Steward of the Year is Rudy Garcia from the City of Detroit Professional and Technical Unit.



Rudy stepped up in 2023 to become first, Chief Steward, then, Unit Leader when the Detroit Pro-Tech Unit experienced two retirement/resignations by long term office holders. He is responsible for the new member packets, presentation, and union member sign-ups in the unit and has been very successful. Rudy has served as Steward during investigations, successfully grieved a mishandled payroll process, and also is a member of the bargaining team that is currently negotiating a new Agreement.

Rudy was unable to attend. Region 3 Divisional Vice President Carmella Johnson accepted the award on his behalf from Labor Relations Specialist Lamont Williams.

The Human Services Support Unit Steward of the Year is Rhonda Clark from the Unemployment Agency.



The decision for Steward of the Year never gets easy for us because HSS has 15 strong leaders who never shy away from showing up, speaking out, and standing up for the rights of our hardworking members. Ordinarily, each of our jurisdictions have at least two stewards, but in our Saginaw area Rhonda Clark has been holding it down on her own due to former bargaining unit leaders promoting out. With her quick progression from Alternate, to Steward, to Chief Steward, we thank Rhonda for stepping up and doing so with grace and a beautiful smile.

L-R: Human Services Support Unit Award Winner Rhonda Clark receives her award from HSS Unit President Janice Cosey.

The Technical Unit Steward of the Year is Paul Cristini from the Michigan Department of Transportation.



Paul is the Technical Unit Grievance Chair and a Chief Steward. He is always willing to handle investigatory and disciplinary meetings and grievance handling. A recent case had him filing a Civil Service Grievance with the State of Michigan regarding MDOT's violating their own overtime equalization policy statewide. The only time Paul ever said no to handling something was when he went to New Orleans for the weekend to watch the Lions play and win!

L-R: Technical Unit Award Winner Paul Cristini receives his award from Technical Unit President Rod Jackson.

The Scientific and Engineering Unit Leaders of the Year are Leni Steiner-Zehender and Imil Assaf.



Leni started her union journey while she was in the Technical Unit holding many leadership positions including the Grievance Committee and serving on the Technical Unit Board. After joining the Scientific and Engineering unit, she has successfully served our Membership as a Steward since 2006. Leni currently is an S&E Board Member, a 517M Executive Board Member, and a New Member Orientation presenter working to sign-up our MDOT new hires. Leni believes that our Union is only as strong as our members’ involvement...that our source of strength is in our unity and that many hands make little work.

L-R: Scientific and Engineering Unit President Greg Merricle with Program Coordinator and Senior Labor Relations Specialist Howard Gordon present the award to Leni.



Imil has worked for the Michigan Department of Transportation as an Engineer for the past 8 years. He has successfully served the membership both as a Steward since 2019, and as a presenter on the MDOT New Member Orientation Team since 2023. Imil is passionate about helping grow a stronger Union. Through his leadership, the Union ensures a reliable and persuasive order of checks & balances without which management might make decisions in the best interests of the Employer, and not balance that with what is also best for the Employee.

Imil was unable to attend. Scientific and Engineering Unit President Greg Merricle accepted the award on his behalf from Program Coordinator and Senior Labor Relations Specialist Howard Gordon.

### **AFRAM Presentation at the Steward Training**



Yolanda Johnson presented a history of AFRAM at Local 517M. This history was published in the [February 2024 E-Former](#).



She also told the members how to join AFRAM. A copy of the membership application can be accessed through the link below.

[Link to Membership Application](#)

The cost to join is \$15 a year and is open to all. Payment can be made via check or via CashApp.



## Battle Creek Members Active in Their Community

The City of Battle Creek unit members held its annual Community Outreach Drive from January 23rd to February 16th. Blankets and warm items were collected for the homeless.

There were 6 drop off locations throughout the city. All donations were sent to The Haven Rest Ministries of Battle Creek. This included cash donations made by the Starlite Collective, a group of over 120 creative artists supporting and uplifting the arts-forward community in Kalamazoo.

"We are very grateful to all who made donations, and to the Employer for their support in this initiative" said Battle Creek employees Unit President Yolanda Johnson.



Left Picture: A volunteer of Haven Rest Ministries helps Unit Vice President Penny Hepler (Right) unload the donations.



Right picture: City of Battle Creek member Marcie Thompson at a collection bin in City Hall.

## Join the 2024 SEIU Respect Squad

In 2023 we took big steps for good jobs & strong communities in Michigan.

- Made history, by repealing so-called “right to work”.
- Renewed and expanded a wage pass thru for thousands of nursing home workers & passed bills to help fix the staffing crisis.
- Won historic contracts and raises for workers across the state.
- Showed up BIG and continue to fight to restore local control and give working people more power to decide how our communities are run.
- Restored school workers’ rights to voluntarily contribute to their unions, free from unfair barriers.

Let’s keep our momentum going in 2024! Join with other SEIU Michigan members to grow your skills, build our power and plan, and take action together to win big for working people! Visit: [bit.ly/MI-24-Respect](https://bit.ly/MI-24-Respect) to sign up. Contact Jamiel Martin, 313-622-8995 or [jamiel@seiumisc.org](mailto:jamiel@seiumisc.org)

## Michigan Plan to Win Unions for All

Join other SEIU members on Saturday, April 27th from 9:00 am - 12:00 Noon at the SEIU Healthcare Michigan Office (1848 E. Sherman Blvd, Suite I, Muskegon) to discuss how we can empower more working Michiganders to join unions, so we can all have a stronger voice about our jobs and future. [Register](#)

Future Dates and Locations Include:

May 4th—Flint  
June 5th—Lansing  
July 20th—Marquette  
August 10th—Detroit

Registration information for these additional locations will be provided at a later date.

Our hard work keeps Michigan going. Let’s make sure more of us — no matter what zip code we live in — have a seat at the table to build a state that puts working families first.