



**SEIU 517M**  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

# The *E-Former*

The Official Electronic Newsletter of  
SEIU Local 517M

## March/April 2025

### Steward Training Recap



Around 100 stewards and leaders attended the annual SEIU Local 517M Steward/Leadership Training. This training was held on Saturday, March 29th and Sunday, March 30th at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Lansing.

Saturday's day-long session entitled "Skills for the Steward" was led by Michelle Kaminski, Ph.D., and Dan Hamilton from

the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations at Michigan State University. This training focused on the role of the steward in grievance handling and talked about the history and trends in the labor movement.

Sunday had a variety of topics and activities. Beth Kelly Byrd from the SEIU Michigan State Council and Reesa Kossoff from SEIU gave an update on legislation and the current political landscape. Breakout sessions addressed the individual needs of our three state employee units and all the school and local government members. There was a session dealing with the steward and leader's role with New Employee Orientations. Topics were presented through a combination of lecture, small group, trivia, and role-play exercises for participants to expand their skills as a leader.

There was a special presentation from the Union Staff Association of SEIU 517M to Secretary/Treasurer Joey Combs in appreciation of her work as Interim Executive Director. Pictured L-R: USA Secretary/Treasurer Andrea Valerio, Joey Combs, USA Steward Howard Gordon.



Photo Collage on Next Page

### Staff Directory

**Interim Executive Director:**  
[Greg Merricle](#) - 517.267.2065

**Information Services/  
Union Member Discounts:**  
[Dave Corrie](#) - 517.267.2090

**Office Manager:**  
[Ashley Konyha](#) - 517.267.2095

**Dues & COPE Deductions:**  
[Andrea Valerio](#) - 989.797.4241

**Member Strength Director:**  
[Marian Wilcox](#) - 517.744.5393

**State Unit Labor Relations:  
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 and Local Government Unit  
Labor Relations:**

[Clint Bryant](#) - 989.797.4258

[Christine Stressman](#) - 616.696.2141

[Lamont Williams](#) - 313.314.6511

[Brandell Tomanica](#) - 517.237.0426

**STAND TOGETHER — STAND STRONG**

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



[@seiu.517m](https://www.tiktok.com/@seiu.517m)



## Detroit Mayoral Candidate Forum April 29th

The Metro Detroit AFL-CIO will be hosting a forum for Detroit mayoral candidates on Tuesday, April 29, 2025 from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm. The forum will be held at the IBEW Local 58 Hall located at 1358 Abbott Street in Detroit. SEIU Local 517M represents members who work for several employers within the city limits, and many members live across the City of Detroit.

If interested in attending, contact Joey Combs at [seiulocal517m@gmail.com](mailto:seiulocal517m@gmail.com) or 517.267.2068 for more information.

## Grand Haven Members Achieve Bargaining Victory



Congratulations to the City of Grand Haven DPW and Wastewater employees who just successfully negotiated a successor 3-year Collective Bargaining Agreement. Through their collective voice at the bargaining table, the membership achieved improvements in wages, holidays, longevity, bereavement, sick time, uniforms, PTO, and vision insurance.

A huge shout out of congratulations to the bargaining team and SEIU members at the City of Grand Haven on their hard fought and well-deserved success at the bargaining table.



The team, pictured left L-R: David Palmer (Wastewater Steward), Seth Recker (Bargaining Team Member), Trevor Baykowski (Bargaining Team Member), Matt Vrablic (President).

## 2025 Scholarship Applications 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. The deadline for submissions is May 23, 2025. Scholarship applications are available now so [Click here](#).

## Mark Your Calendar for the Upcoming Scholarship Fundraiser



The 2025 SEIU 517M Tomorrow's Michigan Today Scholarship Bowling Fundraiser will be held on Saturday, June 28, 2025 at Royal Scot Golf and Bowl in Lansing. This is the main fundraiser for the scholarship fund. More details, costs, lane slots, and registration links will follow.

## Steward of the Year Presentations

Each year we recognize our Steward of the Year award winners for each unit and region. This year's winners are:

### Mathew Mendez – Human Services Support Unit



L-R: HSS VP Roland Whitelow, Mat Mendez, HSS President Janice Cosey

Mathew (Mat) Mendez is a dedicated public servant working for the State of Michigan with a rich background in both military service and union advocacy. With a strong commitment to helping others, Mat's career is focused on improving the lives of other veterans who have served this country.

After proudly serving in the military, where he honed essential leadership skills, Mat transitioned into a career where the core values of discipline, integrity, and service to others remain central. Three years ago, Mat became a union steward, advocating for the rights of his coworkers and ensuring their voices are heard in the workplace. Mat was elected to the HSS Unit Board and has served on the HSS bargaining team. In Mat's multifaceted roles, he has leveraged the experience and leadership qualities necessary to effectively negotiate and support the

needs of our members.

Whether it was during his time in the military, working on behalf of Michigan veterans, or in the capacity of a union representative, Mat always tries to make a positive impact by ensuring fairness, dignity, and respect for all.

### Robert Frisk – Scientific and Engineering Unit



L-R: S&E President Brad Loskosky, Robert Frisk, SEIU 517M Staff Howard Gordon

Robert is a Laboratory Scientist in the Department of Health and Human Services for 7 years with the State of Michigan. Robert is a "Yooper" who hails from a town called Michigamme and is the son of a USW Steelworker. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry & Molecular Biology/Biotechnology from MSU. He has participated as part of the Union Leadership for a few years now, but has been much more involved during the past two. He is currently a steward and serves at the Joint Laboratories building shared between EGLE and DHHS.

### David Peck – Technical Unit



L-R: Tech President Rod Jackson accepting on his behalf, SEIU 517M Staff Kevin Karpinski

David is a Radio Technician in Gaylord responsible for monitoring and repairing radio towers, State Police squad cars, and any other first responder communication radio device tasks. He stepped up to become a negotiations team member and steward in the Unit. He has been responsible for communicating with his radio Tech members and setting up meetings with them. He helped get us on the agenda for an in-person meeting with the radio techs during a statewide divisional meeting. He brought safety issues and subcontracting concerns forward to department management and participated in the Labor-Management meetings on these subjects. He has the respect of his peers and the department management. He certainly earned this award and has been a great addition to the Technical Unit leadership.

### Region 1 – Jessica Huber - Saginaw County Community Mental Health Agency Unit



L-R: Jessica O'Neal accepting on her behalf, SEIU 517M Staff Clint Bryant

Jessica is a dedicated wife and mother of three young children, bringing a wealth of experience as a registered dietitian with CMH, where she has excelled for 10 years. Her passion for both clinical work and union advocacy is unmatched. During recent negotiations, she demonstrated unwavering commitment, working tirelessly with the entire team to maintain organization and focus.

Jessica is not afraid to speak out with a sharp tongue when defending her fellow union members, making her an invaluable asset to our membership.

Throughout her tenure as a Union Leader, Jessica has advanced from steward to chief steward of the unit, emerging as a powerful voice for economic justice for working families. Having recently completed a three-year term as a steward, she is fully dedicated to training the next generation of leaders at her facility. Jessica's leadership makes a significant difference, and she continues to drive us forward with determination and strength.

### Region 2 – Matthew Gillette – City of Muskegon DPW Unit



L-R: Matthew Gillette, SEIU 517M Staff Christine Stressman

Matthew is recognized for his dedication and commitment to his leadership role representing his bargaining unit members. Matt has worked for the City of Muskegon for 23 years as a Department of Public Works employee. Serving his union brothers and sisters in multiple leadership positions 20 of those 23 years. He has served as a bargaining team member for the last 20 twenty years, Treasurer for about 10 years, and Chief Steward for 11 years. His dedication for serving and representing his unit membership is unwavering. Matt is the father of 4 girls, 2 of which are twins. So he's a bit "outnumbered" in his household. Matt loves to fish and is known to be quite the grill master. Thank you Matt for setting the bar high and being a great example of a 517M leader.

### Region 3 - Sharon Thompson - City of Detroit Professional and Technical Unit



L-R: Sharon Thompson, SEIU 517M Staff Lamont Williams

Sharon often goes above and beyond in her role as Chief Steward of the City of Detroit Police Department Professional and Technical Unit. She is very passionate and committed to fighting the good fight every day, representing her members on issues that impact their daily work lives. Sharon was also very instrumental in establishing Bylaws and a new leadership structure for her unit to lead them in a positive direction.

For over 7 years, Sharon served the City of Detroit in her position in Crime Scene Services. She is a dedicated hard-working mom and a trailblazer who volunteers for the union by regularly recruiting members and other leaders, helping to organize various meetings with Union Members, management, etc. She also served as an active member of the Unit Bargaining Team. Sharon is a proud advocate and union member. Words truly cannot express how thankful our region is for dedication and commitment.

Over the past year, it has been an honor to witness her evolution as a unit leader. Sharon personally told me that she "was very inspired by the *Stand Up, Fight Back* chants at last year's Steward Training." She has been standing up and fighting back ever since!