A Call to Action
To Prevent Shutdown and Furloughs

Shutdown
AFGE Council 220 has been working around the clock to ensure a government shutdown is avoided. AFGE leaders and members were interviewed on major news networks like MSNBC, CBS Nightly News, NBC Nightly News, Marketplace, and more (all available at facebook.com/AFGECouncil220) to discuss what effects a shutdown would have on the 42,000 SSA workers AFGE represents and the 2.2 million Federal workers nationwide that would be expected to work without a paycheck during a shutdown.

As a result, we were successful in avoiding a shutdown come Oct 1 when Congress passed a 45 day Continuing Resolution spending bill that would keep the government open with level funding until November 17, 2023.

AFGE is now leading the charge once again to avoid another potential shutdown when this date arrives right before the holiday season.

Your union needs your help!
Please visit AFGEC220.org and share your shutdown story so that we can tell the American people what not getting a paycheck would do to you and your family during this time of year.

In the unfortunate event a shutdown does occur, AFGE negotiated changes with SSA to our Shutdown MOU so that employees are better protected with their preapproved leave and ability to request furlough for the duration of the lapse in funding. You can find the newly negotiated Shutdown MOU and additional resources about your leave, pay, and benefits during a shutdown at AFGE.org under the shutdown resources tab.

To avoid a shutdown, it will take every union member to continue to rise and join in the effort.

For all shutdown call to action resources, including talking points, letter to the editor, and a take action flyer please visit afgec220.org under the shutdown tab.
Adequate Budget Needed in FY 24 to Prevent Furloughs

In addition to avoiding a shutdown, we also need to ensure that we secure enough resources in the SSA operating budget for FY 24 to avoid employee furloughs and improve customer service delivery. AFGE is asking that Congress fund SSAs operating budget to the tune of $17.4 billion dollars for FY 2024 to meet public demand.

In the event we are unable to secure an adequate budget for FY 24 and furloughs become eminent, AFGE negotiated an administrative “Save Money” furlough MOU with SSA to help mitigate the challenges furloughs will have on the SSA employee. You can view the Save Money Furlough MOU at AFGEc220.org under the shutdown and furlough tab.

It will continue to take increased AFGE member advocacy to secure an adequate budget to prevent furloughs. **Call Congress at 315-817-5437** Let them know what hardship a furlough of up to 30 days or more would have on you and your family in FY 2024.

Urge them to fully fund SSAs operating budget to meet public demand and pay the SSA worker every single paycheck in FY 24 to carry out the mission of the agency. Any further cuts to SSA would cause further deterioration of service delivery that may result in office closures, reduced service hours, and further wait time delays. Share your experiences with Congress about the devastating effects service delays are already having on the public customers we serve, America’s most vulnerable citizens, and the value timely services and benefit arrival has on their lives.

**SSA Worker and Union Strong**

I want to recognize and thank the AFGE Local leaders and Representatives in our 33 affiliate Locals nationwide that work hard with steadfast commitment day in and day out to ensure employees are well represented and their working conditions continue to improve. I would also like to thank our members for your continued dedication and support. Our employee-run Union - by the worker and for the worker - is the vital force that lifts, supports, and carries the SSA worker in their time of need and brings vitality to the job we do. Please never forget how important you are and how much your work matters to your local communities and the American people. There would be no Social Security without the Social Security worker and its Union fighting on.

In Solidarity,

Jessica LaPointe
On October 16, 2023 Our Council President Jessica LaPointe testified at a U.S. Senate Special Committee of Aging field hearing in PA. During the hearing titled Securing Social Security: Accessing Payments and Preserving the Program for Future Generations, she detailed the statistics for the state of Pennsylvania yet the same could be displayed throughout any of the 50 states and territories. She explained some conservative asks on what we as an agency need to continue in the best manner to service our American citizens. These asks included but were not solely limited to:

While our mission and charge have not changed, our ability to meet it has. Since 2010, the number of employees delivering frontline and support services has shrunk by 14%. During this same time, the number of beneficiaries has increased by 25% and Congressional appropriated operating budgets to SSA have decreased by 17% considering inflation. Without appropriating the funds to properly staff the Agency and modernize our systems Congress is setting us up to fail.

**AFGE Proposes for Congressional Consideration an Appropriation for Administrative Expenses in SSA for FY 2024 of $17.39 Billion to Adequately Meet Public Demand:**

This budget proposal would be broken down in the same percentages that SSA has proposed for their FY 2024 budget:

- 56% salary and benefits or $9.72 billion (including pay upgrades, recruitment and retention pay incentives, student loan reimbursement, etc.).
- 16% other objects (i.e., rent, equipment, furnishings, security guards, magnetometers/metal detectors, etc.) or $2.77 billion.
- 17% Disability Determination Service or $2.92 billion.
- 11% IT (technology) or $1.89 billion.

This would restore SSA’s work years (WYs), or staffing levels, to 69,430 or near the FY 2010 level of 70,131 WY when we were arguably meeting public demand. This presumes a 4.1% inflation rate

**Social Security Employees**

The 30,000 frontline workers in Social Security Field Operations are trusted, highly skilled, and fully trained to carry out the mission of the Agency and deliver Social Security benefits and services to our nation’s most vulnerable in an efficient, accurate, and timely manner.

The almost 2,000 Social Security field workers in Pennsylvania and the remaining 28,000 workers in the 1,200 field offices, 24 Tele-service Centers, and 15 Workload Support Units nationwide take their oath to serve the American people very seriously.

As evidenced in the most recent Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), almost 75% of SSA employees identified with the mission of the Agency and over 90% felt it was important for them that their work contributed to the common good.

According to the Partnership for Public Service, a non-profit, non-partisan organization, SSA is ranked the 2nd most trustworthy Agency in federal government, yet according to the same organization, SSA is ranked dead last in job satisfaction: 17th out of 17 amongst large federal agencies in employee engagement and job satisfaction. This is a sharp change from 2010 and 2011 when SSA was ranked 2nd in the best places to work in the federal government.
Since 2010, SSA administrative budgets have been cut by 17% (considering inflation). The Agency has very limited options when it comes to budget cuts. Cutting staff is one of the only options.

Jessica then gave testified some of the sobering facts regarding the state of Social Security Administration:

As a result of budget shortfalls, since 2010, SSA has not been able to replace 10,226 SSA employees Agency wide. Total employment in SSA has declined by over 14% from 2010 to today.

As of September 2022, SSA reached its lowest staffing levels in 25 years. Meanwhile, the number of beneficiaries continues to climb.

The effects of understaffing and underfunding on individual employee morale have been devastating. The Union surveyed its employee members in September 2022 and found:

- 76% stated that their large workloads prevented them from performing their jobs to the best of their ability.
- 9 out of 10 say they know someone that has left their job due to overwhelming work stress.
- 8.5 out of 10 say they know a co-worker that has sought therapy or medication to deal with work stressors.
- Tragically, 8% say they know a coworker that has committed suicide linked to work-related stress.

There appears to be no end in sight as a March 2023 AFGE SSA General Committee member flash survey indicates 54% of respondents indicate they are still considering leaving the agency in the next year.

Throughout the testimony Jessica offer recommendations for every component of Social Security Administration and how it could better support our American Citizens but the it cannot go unnoticed how dedicated she has been on promoting and identifying the benefits of telework, In her deposition she stated:

In the words of Angela DiGeronimo, AFGE Council 220 New York Regional Vice President, and AFGE Local 2369 President:

On behalf of the bargaining unit and the public SSA services, AFGE advocates for a robust telework program. SSA must recognize that the Agency’s business model is antiquated and no longer the best approach to service delivery. Leveraged properly, teleworking will not only address the recruitment and retention crisis that the Agency finds itself in, but it will also be a fiscally responsible option. Telework can be leveraged to increase staffing while keeping brick and mortar expenses low. AFGE does not advocate closing any offices that provide in-person service to the public; however, it is necessary to increase staffing in these existing spaces to provide quality public service.

The job market is changing globally. If SSA is to remain competitive, we must recognize that work is no longer somewhere we go but something we do. SSA must also recognize that the public we serve has also changed and evolved. The elderly and disabled of today no longer want to be restricted to obtaining service from the Social Security Administration by visiting an office and waiting for hours. Today’s SSA claimant is more technologically savvy and wants more options in how to engage with SSA. Many of those options lend themselves to providing telework for the workforce which will provide work/life balance for employees, thereby leading to loyalty and longevity with the Agency.

Telework can theoretically double staffing in an office while keeping rent expenses at current rates. Employees who are in a hybrid telework and in person work schedule may desk share, reducing the need for bigger office space. An office can hire based on the number of employees needed to provide quality public service rather than be limited by the number of employees who can be accommodated in the brick-and-mortar space.

Additionally, telework can be leveraged to hire in competitive job markets. In Teleservice Centers and Workplace Support Units, where employees do not serve the public in person, telework can expand, or remote work jobs created, where the Agency engages in recruitment.

(Full written and oral testimony can be found at AFGE C220.org)
Additionally, telework can be leveraged to hire in competitive job markets. In Teleservice Centers and Workplace Support Units, where employees do not serve the public in person, telework can expand, or remote work jobs created, where the Agency engages in recruitment. The Agency can venture into markets where the salary offered is competitive for the talent and skills needed to perform the duties needed to serve the public.

Telework has proven to be an effective tool for minimizing service interruptions during extreme weather conditions when offices need to close out of health and safety concerns. According to an AFGE Local 3342 case study:

Since SSA employees' return to Field Offices in March 2022, there have been 11 days of severe weather that resulted in full day office closures throughout 17 upstate New York offices represented by AFGE Local 3342. Had these closures occurred in a non-telework environment, SSA and the public served by SSA's Field Offices would have lost upwards of 10,000 hours of productivity. In addition, there is a savings of approximately $341,000 in weather and safety leave that would have been paid to employees, had telework not been available.

Telework eligible employees may continue to provide service to the public from home when they would otherwise not be able to because an office closes. Office closures also happen due to facility issues, such as power outages or plumbing issues. An Agency that is prepared to have their workforce shift to telework when an emergency arises is better equipped to provide quality service to the public during most situations.

AFGE requests that along with a robust telework program, the Agency update antiquated policies. Allowing employees to process claims using information provided through interface with other Agencies will improve public service and streamline processing. Many times, claims pend processing because claimants need to submit proofs. Information that can be verified without claimants needing to provide proof would decrease wait times for processing claims significantly. The policy has been updated in the past. For example, American citizens no longer need to submit birth certificates to show proof of date of birth. The Agency updated policy to allow proof of age tolerance when SSA records show the same date of birth alleged by the claimant. This simple update in policy years ago significantly reduced processing wait times for retirement claims. There are other policies that can be updated and must be updated. Policy changes and telework are intertwined in that they can be leveraged to reduce the need to have elderly and disabled claimants visit an SSA office to have their claim processed.

Lastly, but certainly not least in importance, teleworking is environmentally responsible by reducing emissions. Experts warn that countries need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly. SSA as a Federal employer can do their part in being environmentally responsible while leveraging telework to continue to provide quality service to the public.

With all of the circumstances going on with our agency Jessica honed in one the importance of solid, effective and equipped leadership as she petitioned for Senate confirmation of a New Commissioner.

**Senate Confirmation of New Leadership**
The American Federation of Government Employees and the 42,500 employees it represents have three asks of any leader of the Social Security Administration:

1. That the Commissioner will actively work to improve Union-Management cooperation, engage directly with Union leaders where necessary to bring real leadership to the Agency and not abdicate authority and decision-making to the Office of Labor-Management Relations.

2. That the Commissioner will work to secure full funding for the Agency, while working to improve training, employee morale, and recruitment and retention of the Agency’s bargaining unit workforce.

3. That the Commissioner, driven by accurate data, will improve and expand the telework program, virtual service delivery, necessary technology tools, and accompanying policy modernization. The Commissioner will publicly position telework as a cost-saving and environmental protection measure that improves recruitment and retention of employees, productivity, service delivery, and efficiency. The Commissioner will create remote work positions within the bargaining unit to increase service delivery to the public and improve employee morale and retention.

You can watch Jessica in action. The entire Senate Hearing can be seen at: [https://www.c-span.org/video/?531157-1](https://www.c-span.org/video/?531157-1)
Breaking News: AFGE overwhelmingly ratifies contract changes.

Approved provisions will secure fundamental rights through October 2029; significantly improve issues like training, child care, discipline, and workplace bullying; gives the Union new tools to work directly with Agency leaders to further improve working conditions and public service.

www.afgec220.org
AFGE Chief Negotiator and Council 215 President
Rich Couture is Fighting on Behalf of All of Us

See below, which is notice to SSA’s chief negotiator that AFGE ratified the contract reopener.

Good afternoon, John,

Pursuant to section XLA of the January 18, 2023 Ground Rules MOU, I am writing to inform you that the locals and councils of the AFGE General Committee have voted overwhelmingly to ratify the July 13, 2023 contract reopener agreement to modify six articles of the 2019 SSA-AFGE National Agreement, plus sidebars. This is a positive step forward, as it raises the floor on many important issues for employees, and gives the parties a powerful new tool for making further improvements to working conditions and public service through the union-management cooperation councils, and more.

We have much more work to do together. As you know, SSA fell to 17th place out of 17 large federal agencies in the Best Place to Work in the Federal Government ranking earlier this year. SSA continues to face major recruitment and retention challenges because of the Agency’s lack of competitive pay and benefits, and overwhelming workloads. Numerous surveys consistently demonstrate that many SSA workers are looking at (and taking) jobs outside the agency, especially if their telework remains uncertain, or is reduced or eliminated. Surveys and agency data show that bullying and harassment pervades offices nationwide. Training models need updating to leverage technology and become employee-centered and -focused. On these issues, and so many more, the Union has raised concerns and made substantive proposals to improve how employees are treated, get employees the support they need to do their jobs, and make the agency a better place to work. If the Agency is serious about protecting and improving public service, it begins with taking care of its workers, listening to their concerns, and meeting their needs and interests. It is our expectation that Agency leadership will honor its commitment to openness, transparency, and cooperation in the UMCC process, and in abiding by the terms of the agreement. If so, there is no limit to the good we can accomplish for our employees and for the American public.

AFGE looks forward to this agreement swiftly passing agency head review and being implemented, so that we can get right to work building a better SSA. Please contact me with any questions and concerns. Thank you.

Rich Couture
Chief Negotiator
AFGE General Committee

THANK YOU Rich, the contract bargaining team : Barri Sue Bryant, Brenda Carsten, Angela Digeronimo, Beverly Parks, John Pfannenstein, Shelley Washington, Iris Rakowski, and Edwin Osorio. Many thanks to Leona Gray, Desiray Kennoy, and Djuwana Washington for serving as substitutes when called. We would have achieved this deal without their efforts at the table and in caucus.

And a BIG THANK YOU to President Jessica Lapointe whose leading Social Security onward from 17th place to #1.
Meet Delia Trevino, AFGE Council 220 Communications Chair

Delia Trevino is a dedicated unionist currently residing in Temple, Texas. With a passion for making a positive impact in the workplace and her community, Delia serves as a union steward for local 3184, where she works diligently to advocate for the rights and well-being of her fellow members.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Delia finds solace in the art of photography. With a keen eye for capturing the beauty in everyday moments, she spends her spare time exploring her surroundings and immortalizing them through her lens. Through her photography, Delia not only expresses her creativity but also shares her unique perspective with others.

Delia's dedication to her work, her passion for photography, union work, graphic design, and her commitment to her family all contribute to her well-rounded and fulfilling life. With her unwavering determination and compassionate nature, Delia continues to make a positive impact in her community, her union, and inspire those around her.

Please welcome and congratulate Delia in her new leadership role in AFGE C220 Communications.
The 4\textsuperscript{th} Annual Sisters Keeper Summit was held from Friday, July 28, 2023 – Sunday, July 30, 2023, at the beautiful Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in National Harbor, MD. During the sessions, attendees participated in workshops to include learning about Domestic Violence, Mental Health Awareness, Retirement & Financial Planning, Zumba and much more. In addition to these workshops, they attended open discussions about Veteran Women’s Issues, Challenges of New Union Leaders, New Parental and Pregnancy Laws, and Women’s Health Awareness, just to name a few. These workshops and circles are designed to educate its attendees of the various workplace and personal issues that face women in the workplace and in their personal lives. The Sister’s Keeper Summit welcomes all AFGE members to attend regardless of gender identity/expression in order form them to learn how they can empathize and represent their women identifying members by being their Sister’s Keeper!

The 2023 Diversity Week & Human Rights Training Conference was held from Monday, July 31 – August 4, 2023, and consisted of various diversity-based networking and allyship opportunities throughout the week. Attendees had the option to register and attend a week-long course for EEO, New Unionist Training, Collective Bargaining, Worker’s Compensation, Racial Justice, Coordinator Bootcamp, Conflict Resolution, Workplace Bullying, the Organizing Institute, Heath, Safety & Emotional Wellbeing, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. These weeklong courses provide valuable knowledge and skills that the attendees can utilize to improve representation for their members and to ensure they Stay Ready in the fight for justice and equality of all federal and dc government workers!

After the workday had been completed, attendees were invited to attend the annual in-person meetings for each of AFGE’s Constituency Groups, to include AFGE A.P.O.W.E.R., AFGE B.L.A.C.K., AFGE HISCO, and AFGE PRIDE. During the AFGE HISCO and AFGE PRIDE meetings, attendees held elections for the chair, vice-chair, and secretary positions of the Group’s Executive Boards. Each Constituency Group reviewed their strategic plans and goals, their charters, and discussed various other topics and orders of business. The AFGE Women’s and Fair Practices Departments are excited to have these groups led by amazing activists within various AFGE capacities and from different respective agencies that we represent. These Constituency Groups are eager to represent their communities and ensure that everyone has a seat at the table and everyone’s voices are heard, both in the workplace and in their union. In WFP, we believe that our Diversity as a Labor Union is one of our greatest strengths, for it is not our differences that divide us, but it is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences which holds us back from reaching a real place of solidarity and unity within AFGE. If you are interested, then we encourage you to join any of the Constituency Groups as a member or ally of the community and help to be the change that we wish to see in Government and in AFGE. Please see the meeting date and Zoom registration links below for more information.

To watch our SKS/HRTC In Review Video, 

To view pictures from the Conference, 

**AFGE A.P.O.W.E.R.**; 3\textsuperscript{rd} Tuesday at 7:00 PM EDT  
**AFGE B.L.A.C.K.**; 3\textsuperscript{rd} Wednesday at 7:30 PM EDT  
**AFGE HISCO**; 3\textsuperscript{rd} Thursday at 7:00 PM EDT  
**AFGE PRIDE**; 2\textsuperscript{nd} Thursday at 7:00 PM EDT
Summer LegCon '23

2023 AFGE SSA SUMMER LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE
JUNE 20-22, 2023

REGISTRATION
https://events.afge.org/24Dvd1

Nationals Baseball game June 20th at 7 PM. Info to attend included in registration link.

SSA NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION RALLY
At U.S. Capitol Building (House East Front, Grassy Area 11, bounded by 15th Drive, First St. SE, Independence Avenue, SE and East Front Plaza)
JUNE 21st at 12:00 NOON SHARP

If you can’t make it in person Virtual Appointments Possible

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

IMPORTANT: This information should not be downloaded using government equipment, read during a break in a public place, or shown or distributed in a public place. It suggests action to be taken in support or opposition to legislation. Do not use your government email address or government phone to contact your Members of Congress.
In a agency where work stress and heavy environmental challenges continue to loom large, grassroots initiatives starting with the everyday employee have emerged as powerful vehicles for change. Locally-driven efforts hold immense importance in addressing issues at the field office level and fostering impactful transformations upwards to central office. This article explores the significance of grassroots initiatives and provides insights into effective strategies for their successful implementation. Note in this article Community is Social Security Administration.

The Power of an Individual Impact: Grassroots initiatives are community-driven efforts that empower individuals to take collective action for change. These initiatives hold several key advantages:

**Local Relevance**: Grassroots initiatives are rooted in the unique needs (workload balance, property training, competitive pay for example). This ensures that the solutions generated are relevant and directly address the challenges faced by the employees.

**Inclusivity**: By involving you the employee in decision-making processes, grassroots initiatives ensure that your voices of marginalized and underrepresented groups are heard and your needs are met. This promotes inclusivity and equity in the solutions offered.

**Empowerment**: Grassroots initiatives empower you to become an active participant in the change you wish to see. This fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among all of us resulting in sustained efforts towards achieving goals.

**Flexibility and Innovation**: Local initiatives can adapt quickly to changing circumstances and experiment with innovative solutions. The absence of bureaucratic hurdles often enables quicker implementation of ideas.

**Catalysts for Larger Change**: Successful grassroots initiatives can inspire larger-scale changes by showcasing the feasibility and impact of agency-led efforts. They can also influence policy decisions at higher levels.

Strategies for Implementing Grassroots Initiatives:

**Identify the Issue**: Your union has identified specific issues that resonates with each one of us. We have conducted surveys, focus groups, and discussions to gain insights into the challenges that need to be addressed.

**Build Strong Networks**: We continue to establish relationships with community members, local leaders, and organizations that share an interest in the chosen issue. Collaboration enhances the initiative's reach and effectiveness.

**Raise Awareness**: Your Communication Council believe effective communication is key. We use social media, workshops, and local events to raise awareness about the issue and the initiative's goals. Engage with the community to build support.

**Mobilize Resources**: Mobilize human, financial, and material resources from within the community. This comes in the form of UNION MEMBERSHIP. We are stronger in numbers.

**Collaborative Decision-Making**: Involve our SSA Employees in decision-making processes. Your insights and perspectives are invaluable in shaping solutions that align with local needs.

Lots can be accomplished with commitment and organization to move our issues forward.
Grassroots initiatives embody the spirit of community-driven change, offering a potent avenue to address pressing issues and create meaningful transformations. By harnessing the power of local knowledge, engagement, and collective action, these initiatives hold the potential to inspire a ripple effect of positive change that reaches far beyond their immediate communities. Implementing grassroots initiatives requires careful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to inclusivity, but the rewards in terms of lasting impact are well worth the effort.

SSA is in a dire state of emergency after years of underfunding. SSA's administrative funding for basic operations fell by more than 17 percent from 2010 to 2022, after accounting for inflation.

Failing to properly fund SSA will prevent people from accessing their benefits and leave the most vulnerable Americans without a lifeline. Field offices will be closed in many communities, those that remain open will have shortened hours and see minimal seniors and individuals with disabilities that are facing long wait times to get help. Phone access to both field offices and the national 800 number will be reduced or nearly eliminated.

Our lawmakers MUST:
1. Avoid a government shutdown
2. Fully fund SSA's $17.4B budget
3. Urge the Senate to confirm a permanent Commissioner

CALL (315) 817-5437...

Encourage your Congressperson in the House and Senate to back all legislation that supports Social Security's long-term solvency without increasing the retirement age or any further cuts to benefits, as well as the publics' ability to access Social Security's benefits and services timely.

AFGE.org
SSA in Crisis: Why is a simple solution not easy?

Edwin Osorio, 1st Vice President of Labor Relations

SSA has been on a downward trajectory for the better part of two decades. The obvious question should be: how can we fix it? However, the more prudent question which no one seems to be asking out loud is: why is a failing leadership continuously permitted to execute its vision of failure? Einstein is famously quoted as saying: “the definition of insanity is repeating the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” In this instance, the insanity is in placing faith in a leadership that appears to have no sense of fidelity to its most valued asset (the BUE) in stark contrast to the egalitarian principles that are the bedrock of the most successful American program devised to protect our most vulnerable in their time of need, a program that should command the same reverence and sanctity as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. SSA has not demonstrated any dedication to the precepts of such a concept. Instead of being ameliorative, SSA leadership embodies the attributes and deficiencies of oppressors in search of a triumphant result from a perceived zero sum game versus the American public that often goes beyond their physical capacity despite staffing deficiencies, inept leadership, and indiscriminately devoid of assurances that they will be valued by leadership.

In furtherance, It is my opinion that SSA exploits its employees by giving them more work than they can reasonably achieve with any level of proficiency. As a result, employees feel alienated from the nobility of the work that they do because failure is inevitable, thus denying employees of any sense of accomplishment that should be a prerequisite for any semblance of achievement that routinely leads to satisfaction in the workplace.

It often feels that SSA management is emblematic of the Agency’s strong aversion to working in tandem with the Union to resolve issues efficiently and effectively at the lowest possible level. While the Union conversely is unequivocally willing to show immeasurable deference to the Agency for the purpose of practical solutions and ideas that would bring comity to the employees and efficiency to the delivery of public service;
This defective, yet destructive mindset makes SSA impervious to good counsel and a detriment to the goals and objectives of the Agency’s mission and its future.

This makes SSA the metaphorical rudderless ship on the precipice of capsizing, bringing slow ruin to the greatest anti-poverty program conceived by American Exceptionalism. History has shown us examples of how equally colossal failures had been remedied.

Some of the largest corporations in business: Apple, Fiat, Merck, Marvel Enterprises, and Chrysler, some of which have economies of scale larger than many small countries have all found themselves in situations where their respective leadership was causing diminishing results. Spoiler alert: not one of these corporations sought to continue with the failing leadership as a viable response to misfeasance, nonfeasance, or incompetence. What did happen was leadership was changed and every one of these companies changed their trajectory and embarked on their greatest levels of profitability.

Even though SSA is not predicated on making a profit, the same principles apply, requiring a leadership that demonstrates imagination, innovation, accountability, and above all else, veneration and respect for their rank and file employees—similar to SSA, the frontline workers are indispensable and should be treated so.

It cannot be enough for leadership to want to succeed. We need a leadership that has the motivation to do what circumstances demand. We need leadership that will be bold when necessary; will be innovative when necessary; but above all else, we need a leadership that is not afraid to lead and knows when to follow.

SSA leadership must possess the moral fortitude to do what is right irrespective of political pendular winds.

Empathy is a prerequisite for promoting an engaged and committed workforce. Moreover, we need a compassionate culture within the workplace where our leaders are consistently demonstrating genuine interest and concern for its frontline employees and a willingness to respond to the everyday concerns of the BUE and prioritize its concerns. A leadership that is prepared to act in such a way will incentivize and invigorate a BUE to aspire to being its best, which will translate in optimal and potentially stellar civil service. This can only be achieved when AFGE is recognized as a bona fide partner and every bargaining unit employee as a stakeholder in the success of SSA.
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LACTATING WHILE AT WORK IS NOT……

Jennifer Ramirez, C220 Health and Safety

Committee Co-Chair

Lactating while at work is NOT just any room to express milk.
It’s NOT a cold training room or IVT room.
It’s NOT a dusty mailroom.
It’s NOT a private interviewing room.
Lactating while at work is NOT a rigid schedule.
It’s NOT whenever it’s convenient for management.
It’s NOT based on office demands or operational needs.
Lactating while at work is NOT management’s warrant to invade your privacy.
It’s NOT something that you earn or need to justify.
It’s NOT something you need to apologize for.
It’s definitely NOT something to feel ashamed of.

Lactating while at work does mean you are given preferential treatment.
It does not mean you get extra “perks”.
Or that you owe management anything for allowing you to lactate while working.
So, what is lactating while at work?

According to OPM’s “Guide for Establishing a Federal Nursing Mothers Program” “OPM urges agencies to support all nursing mothers to the fullest extent possible.” OPM recognizes the importance of a successful and effective lactation program in the workplace and directly links it to productivity, organizational loyalty, recruitment and retention, job satisfaction and morale. As per the memorandum “As the Nation’s largest employer, the Federal Government strives to be a leader in the promotion of wellness programs and progressive workforce policies” This includes SSA which is an Agency that is predominately female.

The Union has received numerous statements regarding local management sending women to the bathroom to lactate, to the parking lot, storage closets, breakrooms, private interviewing rooms etc. Many employees feel that management has negatively rated them in their PACS and have overlooked them as far as promotions and upward mobility due to lactating. Some complaints involve harassment, intimidation and excessive monitoring during lactation sessions. Some women have been walked in on during their lactating sessions due to being provided rooms that cannot be locked from the inside and as a result have decided to stop lactating all together.

So what have we done about this?

The Health and Safety Committee brought this up at our last meeting in November 2022 which was referred by the Agency to SSA’s medical office. We have made several informal attempts to rectify what we call a “Women’s Health Crisis in SSA” Our last informal attempt was a recent email to former Deputy Commissioner of Operations Grace Kim which she responded by stating “While I appreciate the recommendations laid out to OPE’s Medical Office in your December 2022 email below, I will respect the labor process and not get ahead of those upcoming negotiations for Article 20.
The Union looked forward to pushing this issue formally and had enough information from our recent Council survey to be proactive in negotiations.

Recent contract negotiations proved successful in securing more rights for lactating mothers.

Article 20, Section 8 now reads:

The Parties agree to provide support for lactating employees. To the extent required by law, a lactating employee must be granted reasonable time to express breast milk for the employee’s nursing child each time the employee has a need to do so. This may include rest/break periods, meal periods, changes in work schedules/shifts, the ability to flex out, the use of annual leave, LWOP, credit hours, compensatory time, or other arrangements as appropriate.

If requested, Management may grant extensions of rest/break times or the meal period for up to a total of 15 minutes per day for employees to express breast milk. As an exception to the provisions of Article 10, Appendices A and B, nursing employees in field offices and teleservice centers may request to flex out at times during the workday in addition to the meal period in order to express breast milk.

Management will provide a private place, other than a restroom, that is shielded from view (including from video recording devices) and free from intrusion from co-workers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk. This onsite private location should afford a comfortable environment for the nursing employee and contain a small table, a comfortable chair, and one electrical outlet. To the extent feasible, Management will provide space with a lockable door and avoid assigning a space that contains high-traffic equipment like copiers, printers, etc. There should be a sink nearby if one is not located in the room. For each Agency facility lacking a dedicated refrigerator for storing expressed milk, upon request, the Agency will provide one “mini-fridge” per site, for dedicated storage of expressed milk. The “mini-fridge” may be used for other storage when not in use for this purpose. Normally, the “mini-fridge” will be located within the dedicated lactation space. The space will be cleaned daily in accordance with existing office cleaning procedures.

Employees will not be required to sign an SSA Lactation Program Agreement to use Agency space for lactation purposes. Employees may be requested to sign an acknowledgement statement regarding use of an Agency health unit facility for lactation purposes. Employees who request to express breast milk at the workplace will be informed of these provisions.

“SHE IS AFGE”

She is a mother, a daughter, a sister, and a friend and She is someone you can count on and on that you can depend.

She is a lawyer, a doctor, an assistant, or a nurse, and throughout most of her history, she was often times the first.

She is a leader, a president, a coordinator, or even an NVP, and she has shown us that with hard work, a little passion and purpose, she can be anything she wants to be.

She has climbed mountains of oppression and broken glass ceilings along the way, but let us not forget, that she’s still fighting for equal pay.

She represents many types of diversities and has fought through the toughest fights, yet she still stands up for others and advocates for all of our rights.

She is stronger than she knows and always finds a way to push through, but even when she’s struggling, she will give her all to you.

When people often ask me why I stand for Women’s Rights, I remind them that it was “She” who conceived me into life.

She means so much to so many of us, and She Is Everything to me, but let me remind each of you, that She Is AFGE!!!

Jeremy A. Lannan
NVP for Women’s and Fair Practices
Nurturing the Future: The Imperative of Developing Union Succession Plans

Unions have long been stalwarts in the battle for workers' rights, ensuring fair treatment, equitable compensation, and improved working conditions. Yet, as the torch-bearers of change and progress, unions themselves must also plan for their own sustained vitality. Enter the crucial concept of developing succession plans. In an era of shifting demographics and evolving challenges, the need for unions to cultivate a seamless transition of leadership has never been more essential.

Unions, much like any organization, stand at a crossroads when it comes to leadership transitions. A union's strength hinges on the collective vision and determination of its members, but these qualities can only flourish with capable and visionary leaders at the helm. A succession plan is a roadmap to ensuring that leadership transitions are smooth, well-prepared, and aligned with the union's values and goals.

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One of the foremost reasons for unions to develop a succession plan is to maintain continuity in their advocacy efforts. Unions often have rich histories, battle scars, and deeply ingrained knowledge. Without a plan for leadership transition, there's a risk of losing institutional memory, valuable experience, and the momentum gained over years of hard-fought battles. A well-structured succession plan safeguards the union's legacy and ensures that its past achievements continue to shape its future course.

Furthermore, succession plans empower unions to adapt to changing times and challenges. In a rapidly evolving landscape, both within the workplace and society at large, new issues arise that demand innovative approaches. Developing leaders with fresh perspectives, while also valuing the wisdom of experienced members, helps unions remain relevant and responsive. A thoughtful succession plan identifies potential leaders who can bring a diversity of viewpoints, fostering adaptability and resilience.

Attracting and retaining talented individuals is another paramount reason for unions to invest in succession planning. Emerging leaders need to see a clear path for growth and development within the organization. A succession plan communicates that the union values its members and provides opportunities for advancement, thereby fostering a culture of engagement, commitment, and loyalty.

Beyond internal benefits, unions with robust succession plans also enhance their credibility and bargaining power externally. When employers and policymakers witness a union's well-prepared and seamless leadership transition, they gain confidence in the union's stability and long-term commitment. This can significantly influence negotiations, advocacy efforts, and the union's overall influence in shaping labor policies.

So, what does an effective succession plan entail? It begins by identifying potential leaders early, nurturing their skills, and providing them with opportunities for growth. Offering mentorship, training, and exposure to different facets of the union's operations equips them for the challenges ahead. A well-designed plan also involves open communication with members, ensuring transparency about leadership transitions and cultivating support for new leaders.

In conclusion, unions are not immune to the inevitability of leadership change. The need for union succession plans is clear: to preserve the hard-won gains of the past, remain adaptable to the present, and fortify their influence in the future. By nurturing a new generation of leaders, unions ensure their continued relevance, strength, and ability to champion the rights of workers. Just as unions have fought tirelessly for the empowerment of workers, so too must they empower their own succession to keep the flame of progress burning brightly.
The single most important function of any Union is negotiating a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA or Contract) on behalf of its bargaining unit. All other Union functions stem from the CBA. Litigation, Organizing, Lobbying etc. would either not exist or be severely weakened without a Contract that was negotiated in good faith between the Union and management.

Employee advocates are not born as advocates, they develop from a seed of justice present in their DNA. Advocates grow from a profound feeling of responsibility to be the voice of those who would otherwise not have a voice. From the time the conscious choice is made to become a Union representative, the voice of the bargaining unit, growth begins with small steps. Developing as a Union representative means that you learn your craft through educating yourself on the Contract that provides the road map to employee rights and benefits. As an advocate develops in understanding of the Contract, they develop the ability to apply the provisions of that Contract to protect and stand up for the bargaining unit. They also develop in their ability to recognize what needs to be corrected, built upon, and added to the Contract at the next opportunity for bargaining.

For the bargaining unit, the road to fair and equitable conditions of employment and benefits, which reflect appreciation for their talent and skill, begins with a Union advocate at the bargaining table. The labor/management dance is a continuous series of ongoing battles, big and small, striving always to improve conditions of employment for the employees who day in and day out show up to provide the best service possible. For Federal employees and their Union representatives that means providing quality public service to the people who are in most need.

To all Union leaders who have shown the courage to be in the room to negotiate a Contract, take a bow. Your performance is appreciated by the many voices that you represent.
Council 220 Caucus
There is Unity in Community

Battery Wharf Hotel
Three Battery Wharf
Boston, MA 02109

(617)-994-9000

Register in advance for this meeting:
http://bit.ly/3P7WUbY

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Travel Days
Nov 6 & 10

Caucus
Nov 7 – 9

Each local will be responsible for their own hotel reservations

Virtual Contact:
Greg Lalak
L1164 President
President@afgelocal1164.org

General Contact:
Jill Hornick
C220 Secretary, NCSSAFOL
jill.hornick@att.net
Many of you out there have probably become very tired and bored of Amad’s broken record about the Veteran’s New Hire Checklist and push for more media attention to expose SSA and Congress about their great neglect of SSA workers and the public we’re trying to serve. But you know what? I don’t mind taking the brunt of criticisms about all of that, because the price to pay without bringing the necessary attention to those issues is far worse than any hurt feelings.

It takes a village to bring improvements to these and other issues. For that matter, our Union has come together well when it comes to Veteran issues and Legislative Action. But it’s not enough. As I observe gradual improvements when it comes to our SSA Vets, I still see much, much room for improvements when it comes to our Legislative efforts, which should be combined with new and innovative media efforts. Council 220 President LaPointe has been receptive to all I’ve been saying and trying hard in providing many opportunities, and she’s been facilitating me in my efforts. It’s still not enough, because we need more participation from everyone…, our Union Village!!!

The kind of change/improvements we need at SSA requires more than just a few voices and more than some of the older strategies we as Union have utilized over the years. Each Local President needs to be galvanizing a movement throughout the country with consistent and persistent contacts with Lawmakers and combine that with the most aggressive media campaign we’ve ever undertook. Each Local President should be leading Reps in their respective Locals to straight-up ask District Lawmakers and Senators about their stance on Social Security and keep asking. That effort needs to be combined with media efforts in print, T.V. social media, radio, etc. so that the public becomes even more aware of where their Lawmakers stand on Social Security. Furthermore, Lawmakers should be influenced to hold town halls on the subject and their constituents need to be informed whether or not their District Lawmakers and Senators are balking on the issue. This kind of public exposure will arguably compel more Lawmakers to do more than “say” they support Social Security.

By us as a Union throughout the country “not” adopting this plan, we greatly run the risk of Congress and SSA doing what they already have been doing for the better part of the decade. That gradual undercutting of the SSA program and the harm to its workers and the public is drawing closer to detractors ultimate goal, which is for SSA to sunset or devolve into privatization. Just look at the state of affairs of SSA now. It is an embarrassment and a disservice to us workers and the public we are trying to serve. The detractors are getting their way. But not if we as a strong Union Village do something about it…, something like we’ve never done before.

Me and my Local team in Indiana have been executing this plan. Our continued consistent and persistent efforts is gaining momentum. We’re going to continue. Moreover, we’re going to see how Cooley and AFGE National can help us combine our Legislative efforts with some media assistance. This kind of effort becoming contagious throughout all other Locals is what we need in order to make unprecedented changes happen. The writing is on the wall. We cannot wait any longer or else detractors of America’s Social Safety Net and Unions will have their way and end it all.

Always, In Solidarity!!!

You can follow C220 in the media at facebook.com/AFGECouncil220
Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Workplace

Mark Rogers
Local 3438 Rep and C220 Communications Liaison

Working in the field office, payment center and even regional offices for the Social Security Administration these days have been a challenging duty for bargaining unit employees. Often, we are puzzled with backlogs and management even giving those who “clean their lists” filled with even more workloads. Do you ever get the notion that it may feel as though management punishes you? What about times in which a manager says, “Do this because I am the supervisor” or “You know what my title is?” These are all issues that spur conflict in the workplace. Today we are challenged with the relationship between labor and management and the effective function for us to better serve the public.

A proactive and collaborative approach is needed if we are ever to get back to the point of great working relationships to benefit the needs of the public. Conflict has risen from various factors in the field such as the working conditions, roles, decision making processes, and overall morale from productivity and public service needs. It is important for bargaining unit and management to establish common ground to remain impartial, neutral, and unbiased in our efforts to serve the public and have a satisfying work environment.

There are conflict management strategies we can apply on both spectrums of labor management relations to help us in these efforts. Open communication, collaborative decision making, conflict resolution training, mediation, grievance mechanisms, and shared goals are all solutions in conflict resolution. Open and transparent communication between management is vital for what we do as an agency. Both management and bargaining unit employees must encourage each other to express concerns, suggestions, and grievances freely to prevent misunderstandings and further conflict. This requires both parties to listen to understand versus listening to respond. Title means nothing to the client who needs our assistance.

Collaborative decision making varies drastically from office to office within the agency. We often have deadlines placed on claims while still attempting to meet the demanding needs of the public. Expectations must be realistic and obtainable for all of us within the agency. Employees feel more valued when they are heard versus the do as I say perspective from management.

Conflict resolution training is something that can be very helpful to both management and all employees. Conflict management can result in improved morale, enhanced efficiency, positive public image and higher retention and recruitment efforts within the agency. The well being of the beneficiaries we serve is the ultimate stake of influence for effective conflict management between labor and management relations. When we embrace open communication, collaboration, mediation training and a focus on shared goals we can mitigate conflict and foster a work environment that benefits everyone in the agency.

Here are several questions to consider if your work environment may need a conflict management makeover:

- Do conflicts escalate quickly?
- Is there a lack of open communication?
- Are there frequent misunderstandings?
- Do you feel constantly criticized or blamed?
- Is there a lack of support or collaboration?
- Is there frequent turnover?
- Are there cliques or factions?
- Is Feedback ignored or dismissed?
- Are there ongoing power struggles?
- Are there frequent changes in leadership?
- Is there a high level of stress and burnout?
- Are policies inconsistent or arbitrary?
- Is there a lack of recognition or appreciation?
- Is there a general feeling of discontent?

If you find that you answered “yes” to most of these questions, this could indicate that you are in a high conflict workplace. Recognizing these signs are the first step towards taking action to improve our work environment.

AFGE Council 220 wants to solve these issues as best as possible. Your local steward and various leaders within our union believe there is so much we can accomplish together. If you have any examples of work environments of this nature, please share any examples with us at info@afgec220.org.
The Benefits of Telework: Perspective

Oscar Gonzalez Jr
AFGE Local 3184 Fair Practices Coordinator

When I was hired in 2005 by Social Security as a Title XVI Claims Representative I had no knowledge of Agency's processes. Fresh out of college, I entered the workforce as an elder millennial with feet dipped both in the analog and digital world.

As time passed and my knowledge of SSA systems, policies, and programs grew, I began to understand the potential that existed for reaching and better assisting the public who so desperately need our assistance. In 2008 my office closed for a week due to Hurricane Ike. It did so again in 2017 during Hurricane Harvey, and intermittently so for individual days due to facilities issues at the Field Office. This was par-for-the-course of working in an office. However, back then, this meant employees were placed on administrative leave while we waited for our offices to safely reopen. Thankfully today SSA is able to send employees home to telework during times of emergency office closures and continue service to the public.

In 2009 I was placed in a work group called “ICPU” which was an acronym for Internet Claims Processing Unit. Simplified, it was a means for us to import the EDCS portion of claims and appeals and contact the individuals who submitted them, online. This experience made me question the traditional aspects of office work. A great ‘what if’ began to rise in my mind.

What if we could find remote means to conduct work? The benefits to this would be two-fold. The employees could work from home, improving morale and productivity, and the public could have their issues and questions resolved without needing to wait hours in often overcrowded lobbies. So I talked to my District Manager about this potential, and his dry response to it all was that telework will probably happen…but neither in his nor my time. And then he continued discussing traditional office settings and downplayed the idea. This was in 2010. Some offices started piloting telework, but not mine. Then in 2019, Andrew Saul and Grace Kim ended the program, entirely citing unsubstantiated backlogs and increased workloads.

Then suddenly, in March of 2020, we were sent home. COVID-19 forced its hand and everyone was now working at home under quarantine. A baptism of fire ensued and the great ‘what if’ of my mind’s eye became reality. Changes were forced, adaptation became paramount, and a new reality began to take hold.

During this time of pandemic-induced telework, I took stock of what was gained, personally, by working from home:

- Dramatically less time stuck in traffic to-and-from work
- More opportunity to rest
- Reduced stress
- Reduced distractions
- Less exhaustion

These gains resulted in:

- Less need for leave to be taken
- Improved focus and completion of work assignments
- Improved work/life balance
- Less illness
For the first time in my 18-year career, I am at a point where I am at use-or-lose for annual leave. I am more willing and able to work credit hours and overtime. This has resulted in me taking on other workloads that I otherwise would not have done. Because of telework, I can have a more natural sleep schedule on the days I work from home, and this results in me getting better rest. By not having to fight 45-minute to 1.5-hour traffic, one way, to the office has dramatically reduced my stress and exhaustion. Telework has also caused me to take even less sick days than I had before as I have less exposure to crowds of individuals who often come to the office, sick. My family has also benefited from this as they no longer only see me before 6:00am and after 5:30pm. I am more present with my family as time is being less wasted in traffic and even the quality of time after work hours is better as I am not exhausted when my telework day is over. My spouse was even able to pursue a doctoral degree because of my ability to be more present for my family. In short, telework has drastically improved our quality of life.

I then also took stock of financial gains caused by telework during the pandemic:

- Less vehicle costs and maintenance
- Less eating out
- Reduced medical costs
- Reduced budget for office attire
- Reduced childcare costs for school age kids

In total, I calculated this to be approximately $11,000.00 per year savings. The lion’s share of this is attributed to vehicles and childcare costs for school age kids. This was initially a shock to me until research confirmed what I was experiencing.

Even Social Security, as a whole cannot deny the benefits of telework. Prior to the pandemic, OIG found that telework improved productivity and nonetheless ended the program only to reopen it. During the pandemic, backlogs of pending cases fell because of telework.

I understand that for more than a century, office culture required a physical presence; however, we have reached a turning point. One that is long overdue. It is natural to rest upon what is known, but progress is not found in comfort. Change is on the horizon and is necessary for growth. Instead of resisting the transition to implement telework, Social Security should instead embrace it.
TELEWORK CASE STUDY

In March 2022, Social Security Field Offices returned to in-office operations with a 2 day per week telework program. As a result, Field Office employees who participate in the telework program continue to work when Field Offices are closed due to severe weather or other adverse health and safety conditions.

Prior to SSA implementing any sort of wide-scale telework trial, SSA was obligated to pay weather and safety leave to employees who were scheduled to work in the office during severe weather closures. As a result, there were often days where entire Field Offices were unable to produce work because of these closures. Even when Field Offices did not close, the public was often underserved in severe weather events, because of mass transit disruptions and closures of other community services. Telework has allowed Field Offices to boost customer service in situations where the public would not have been served otherwise.

A real world sample of how telework has been effective in maintaining customer service has been occurring in upstate New York. SSA has many New York offices situated along Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, which is an area notorious for hazardous winter weather, and extended lake effect snow events. Since SSA employees’ return to Field Offices in March 2022, there have been 11 days of severe weather that resulted in full-day office closures throughout 17 upstate New York offices represented by AFGE Local 3342.

Had these closures occurred in a non-telework environment, SSA and the public served by SSA’s Field Offices would have lost upwards of 10,000 hours of productivity. In addition, there is a savings of approximately $341,000 in weather and safety leave that would have been paid to employees, had telework not been available.*

With a robust and permanent telework program, SSA will be able to enhance the level of service it provides in its 1200+ Field Offices, with a long term savings that can be used to restore SSA to the staffing levels required to accomplish its mission fully.

*Case sample based on current agency staffing figures as of 12/31/2022, and agency weather closure notifications provided from 4/1/2022-12/31/2022. Hours of productivity are based on an 8 hour workday, and an assumed 20% reduction due to daily employee leave usage not attributed to weather and safety leave. Cost savings based on assumed GS-11, Step 1 salary, which represents a majority of field office positions in the 17 offices sampled.
Have an idea, topic, question or suggestion?
Reach out to Greg Dorsey and let him know!

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