

Leaders set 2019 strategic plan

Aim to build stronger chapters

Local 888's Executive Board has forged a strategic plan for the new year aimed at strengthening the union to help members win better contracts. The plan was unanimously adopted at the board's Jan. 9 meeting.

The plan includes recruiting hundreds of rank-and-file leaders, emphasizing a comprehensive orientation for new hires and defining six key industry sectors. Those are: early education, public schools, higher education and public authorities along with state and municipal workforces.

The strategic plan lays out a range of legislative priorities including bills that would:

- Grant those working in the state's public defenders agency the right to unionize.
- Upgrade pensions for members working as police dispatchers, natural resource officers, Soldiers Home caregivers and certain DPW personnel.
- Have the state adopt a "Medicare for all" approach to health insurance funding.



LOOKING AHEAD: In line with the Executive Board's plan to have chapter leaders take an oath of office, the new Lottery Commission stewards were sworn in at Local 888 headquarters.

"Achieving our political goals means working with community organizations and coalitions to advance important legislation and link our members' struggles for dignity and justice on the job with the people who benefit from the services they provide," said Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues**.

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SHOWING SOLIDARITY: Members of the Brandeis Labor Coalition support the Local 888 librarians.

Brandeis librarians win with community support

Local 888 librarians at Brandeis University won their new contract with a key assist from the wider college community. Some members will receive up to 15 percent raises over the life of the three-year pact with "market adjustments."

A student group, the [Brandeis Labor Coalition](#), "played a really essential role," said Local 888 organizer **Hersch Rothmel**. "They were the most organized student group I've ever seen."

The librarians' campaign garnered 75 student

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Soldiers Homes tackle staffing woes

SEIU local 888 and 509 members from the Holyoke and Chelsea Soldiers Homes took their campaign to improve working conditions to a new level at a Boston meeting Dec. 21 with Marylou Sudders, the state's secretary of health and human services. Sudders said she would look into the issues around understaffing and meet regularly with Local 888 leaders in a bid to resolve outstanding problems.

"The meeting was very productive," said **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, a CNA and the Holyoke Home's Local 888 chapter chair. "Therefore, it's worthwhile to give her the benefit of the doubt and say: Let's move forward."

"We're just looking for our basic human rights," said **Erin Saykin**, who also works at the Holyoke Home. "As it stands now, management is not giving us enough staff to do our jobs safely."

Union members blamed Holyoke Home management for causing high turnover. The causes include: understaffing, poor use of existing staff, excessive forced overtime and a hostile and retaliatory work



SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED: SEIU staff and leaders met with state officials about problems at the Soldiers Homes. From left: organizer **Joe Montagna**, **Erin Saykin** from the Holyoke Home, **Theresa King** (Holyoke), **Lyneth Martin**, from the Chelsea Home, **Chrissy Wilson** (Chelsea), **Kwesi Ablordeppey** (Holyoke), **Speandilove Nelson** (Chelsea), organizer **Ron Patenaude**, **Elmer Ariazza** (Chelsea), a Local 509 member, Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues** and **Nely Sageth**.

environment generating a pileup of grievances. Ablordeppey said that 21 certified nursing assistants and licensed practical nurses left the facility over a four-month period this fall. New hires have replaced less than half of these.

The meeting with state officials is part of a campaign by Holyoke Local 888 members to seek improvements. They have organized T-shirt protests and delivered a petition to management saying they had

no confidence in the director or assistant director of nursing.

At the Boston meeting, Sudders said she had several "action items," including a staffing study for the Soldiers Homes and better oversight of the discipline process.

"There's good reason to be optimistic that conditions at the Soldiers Homes will improve," **Brenda Rodrigues** said. "Local 888 wants that to happen, so they can continue providing excellent care to our veterans."

Executive Board charts course

Continued from page 1

In line with that, the Executive Board has agreed to join or support:

- The Fund Our Future campaign aimed at increasing state funding for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade by \$1 billion a year. See: <https://massedjustice.org/fundourfuture/>
- MassCare, a coalition working for a single-payer, "Medicare for all"-style health reform

that would save money on administrative costs and cover everyone in Massachusetts. See: <https://www.masscare.org/>

- The Boston PILOT Action Group, which is campaigning for more responsible Payments In Lieu Of Taxes from major tax-exempt organizations. For more info, see: <https://pilotaction.weebly.com/>

A summary of the Executive Board's strategic plan will be posted to Local 888's website.



AIDING THE HOMELESS: Local 888 chapter chair **Teri Lambert**, right, gives a check to Tom Deeg of the Mashpee Homeless for the Holidays fundraiser.

Mashpee aids homeless

Local 888's town, clerical and library workers in Mashpee donated their chapter funds to the Homeless for the Holidays event run by the Mashpee Fire Department.

"When I saw we had the funds available, I sent out an email to all the members asking for a vote as to how they wanted to use their funds this year — a party, pizza or to do something new like donating to a local charity," said **Teri Lambert**, chapter chair. "It was unanimous as the votes came in, and I was so proud to see how caring and generous my members were as they chose to donate the funds instead of having a party."

Mashpee Fire Department union members put on the fundraiser each year. "They sleep and live outside in shifts at a rotary to bring awareness to homelessness, in this state and around the country," said Lambert, a police dispatcher. She added that some of the money raised will go to aid a firefighter who is battling breast cancer.

Moments of Silence

The officers of Local 888 extend our deepest sympathies to the families of:



- **Anne (Feeney) Medeiros** of Acushnet, a retired nurse and mother of **Maureen Medeiros** of Boston, an attorney and interim director of field services for Local 888.

Chair City workers air stories

Local 888 member **Jonathan Dudley** is helping to save — and honor — the hard work and civic contributions of furniture workers in Gardner, known as the "Chair City" and "The Furniture Capital of New England" due to its manufacturing history.



DUDLEY

Dudley is currently working at the Chair City Community Workshop on oral histories connected to the furniture company Nichols & Stone (See <https://www.instagram.com/tracie.pouliot/>). At the time it closed in 2008, Nichols & Stone blamed the Great Recession "along with a flood of low price/low quality imports" for closing its Gardner plant.

Mount Wachusett Community College instructor Tracie Pouliot collected the interviews a year after Gardner's Nichols & Stone closed. Pouliot runs the community workshop, where volunteers use the printing and book arts to celebrate the stories of the working people in Gardner.

Dudley, a Head Start teacher at the Montachusett Opportunity Council, volunteers at the community workshop and has transcribed furniture workers' interviews. After the interview is printed, volunteers sit together and bind each oral history by hand into a book.

"It is a great opportunity to talk about the issues raised in the stories — like why do we think furniture factories closed in Gardner and how deindustrialization has affected our small city," said Dudley. After 400 copies of each oral history book are printed and bound, the community workshop holds a book-release party to celebrate the interviewees and the volunteers.

- **Walter Sullivan**, 88, of Hyde Park. Survivors include his daughter **Christine Sullivan**, who works for Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development and serves as a Local 888 steward.
- Local 888 member **Don Smith**, 57, of Waltham, who worked as a custodian in Watertown.

Brandeis librarians win contract battle

Continued from page 1 testimonials addressed to Brandeis officials and support from multiple unions on campus as well as parents and alumni. These included Jules Bernstein, a labor lawyer who sits on the board of the Waltham university's Heller School of Social Policy and Management.

"All these factors were working in our favor, and we were able to take advantage of them," said Rothmel. "And our own members were fired up and ready to go."

The librarians' new contract, approved unanimously, includes across-the-board raises of at least 9 percent over three years, improved access to professional development and more flexible scheduling and break times.

Negotiations had languished for months; the old contract expired in June. The contract campaign culminated with a Dec. 3 lunchtime rally where the librarians were joined by more than 50 supporters. These included Drew Flanagan, a Brandeis English lecturer and shop steward for the adjunct professors union, [SEIU Local 509](#).

"All we're asking is to be treated with dignity and with the acknowledgment that we do important work," said librarian **Joanna Fuchs** at the rally. "We love our jobs and want everybody in this community to be a success."

Just days later, the librarians hammered out the new pact.

Undergrad **Alina Sipp-Alpers** told a student paper that the Brandeis Labor Coalition attributes the contract victory to the solidarity rally. "The university finally understood that the librarians had the students' support and that they would not back down until they were given a fair contract." (<https://www.thejustice.org/article/2018/12/after-rally-brandeis-university-offers-new-librarians-union-contract>)



FUCHS



SIPP-ALPERS



ON THE UNION BUS: Leaders are looking to take the Haverhill Transportation Group to new heights. Front row from left, **Gail Pelitier**, treasurer; **Gigi Terranova**, chapter co-chair; **Cindy Gouldsbrough**, chapter co-chair; **Beth Chasse**, secretary; **Michelle McCarthy**, steward; and **Rosalida Mendez**, chief steward. And; second row in the yellow shirt, **Gustavo Rivera**, steward.

Haverhill steers new course

There's renewed activism in the Haverhill Transportation Group chapter, with additional leaders helping to fuel a successful drive for a new contract. The chapter covers about 40 school bus drivers, van drivers and bus monitors. To top it off, two grievances were settled in union members' favor last month. The school district has agreed to a more liberal policy for members on maternity leave and to properly post additional work so that members can bid on it.

"Members have really seen the benefit of joining together as a team, with the result that we've made good strides forward" said **Larry Higgins**, Local 888 internal organizer. "Previously, members had an attitude that nothing was ever going to change — but they have now changed their minds," said Higgins.

The new three-year contract includes, for the first time, step raises — which recognize workers for service and dedication. For more on Haverhill, see www.seiu888.org.



LOOK FOR UNION CARDS: SEIU Local 888 will be sending out membership cards through the mail in yellow envelopes. So, be on the lookout!

