

‘We’ve been vindicated’

Probe blasts Holyoke Home’s failed leadership, ‘baffling’ moves

An independent investigation, commissioned by Gov. Charlie Baker, paints a harsh picture of management’s actions at the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home as the deadly COVID-19 crisis swept through the facility. The only silver lining in the report is that it shows Local 888 members and other staffers hard at work trying to care for the veterans who they were determined to serve.

“We’ve been vindicated,” said **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, chapter president, pointing to Local 888 and the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home members. “Much of what we had been complaining about has now come to light,” he added, referring in part to the



THERE TO SERVE: Kwesi Ablordeppey, center, credits the arrival of National Guardsmen, such as those shown here, with helping to stabilize the crisis situation at the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home.

understaffing and poor management that had gone on for years.

The COVID-19 disaster there showed that “management was not up to doing the job,” he said.

The job entailed caring for residents with an average age of 85, according to the report, which said that some of management’s decisions during the crisis “were utterly baffling from an

infection-control perspective, and were inconsistent with the Home’s mission to treat its veterans with honor and dignity.”

With the unveiling of the report, “everybody gets to see what we had to deal with, working with that management,” said **Joe Ramirez**,
For more on Holyoke, see page 3



RAMIREZ



SAYKIN

Higher ed summit tackles race, COVID-19

Local’s 888’s second annual Higher Education Labor Summit threw a spotlight on the struggle for dignity along with health and safety in the COVID-19 workplace — and the importance of the anti-racist demonstrations sweeping the country.

“We need to build and strengthen our union,” **Shaylin Hogan** told a Zoom audience of 35. Beyond that, she said, “we’re living in a historic

moment, with an unparalleled opportunity to change the world.” Hogan is an Emerson College staffer and a Local 888 executive board member.

Higher education is one of Local 888’s key industries. Workers from Emerson and the

For more on Higher Ed, see page 4



HOGAN

Rally's call: Recognize the Union Now

Workers at the nonprofit College Bound Dorchester/ Boston Uncornered took part in a widely reported rally protesting the illegal firing of eight co-workers shortly after the staff announced a decision to unionize.

About 75 workers, their supporters and representatives from labor unions rallied for justice and union recognition several days later. They listened to speeches from workers and local luminaries such as Darlene Lombos, executive secretary-treasurer at the Greater Boston Labor Council, who charged that CBD practices “racism with a smile.”

They then marched down Dorchester Ave. with signs saying such things as “Black Workers Matter, Reinstatement the Eight” and chanting slogans like “Boston is a union town” and “Black Lives Matter on the rise, now it’s time to organize.”

The rally’s demand: That agency CEO Mark Culliton reinstate the eight workers, about a third of the staff, and recognize the union. The workers believe the layoffs are in retaliation for forming a



‘BLACK WORKERS MATTER’: Workers at College Bound Dorchester and their supporters march to protest the firing of staff members.

union, affiliated with Local 888, that they call “Uncornered United.” Local 888 has filed unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board.

College Bound refused to voluntarily recognize the union, so workers petitioned the NLRB for a union certification election. The vote by mail ballot will begin on July 29.

The layoffs particularly antagonized some workers coming on the heels of the agency’s annual fundraiser (this year a virtual one), which pulled in a reported \$650,000,

including \$100,000 from Pats owner Robert Kraft.

The workers have a petition that supporters are urged to sign: tinyurl.com/CBDsolidarity. For a YouTube video of the rally, go to Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/SEIULocal888/>) or follow [this link](#).

College Bound is focused on getting current and former gang members off the streets and into school, using financial incentives to help them through high school and college. The program includes college readiness advisors who are mentors for the young adults.

For now, ‘Dreamers’ safe in U.S.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the Trump administration failed to provide “a reasoned explanation” for ending the “Dreamers” program. So, for now, the nearly 800,000 young immigrants it covers remain free from the threat of deportation.

For Local 888 activist **Jonathan Dudley**, the issue is personal. One of the Dreamers is Dudley’s brother-in-law, Jonathan Vargas, an intensive-care nurse who works with COVID-19 patients in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Dudley, a Head Start teacher with the Montachusets Opportunity Council, said he was “so thankful” for the court ruling, “which will make a huge difference in the lives of people I love.”

President Obama set up DACA — or the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals program — in 2012 as Congress failed to act on immigration reform. These “Dreamers” were brought up in the U.S. — which is their home.

To end the court battling, Congress would have to enact the Dream Act. For a full report, see <https://tinyurl.com/888Dreamers>.

Essential workers in Oxford OK 'good solid contract'

Local 888 members in Oxford are celebrating a new contract — overwhelmingly approved — that delivers raises, an improved sick bank and better language regarding holiday and sick pay.

“It’s a good, solid contract,” said the chapter president, **Mark Giles**. In keeping with the COVID-19 era, voting was done by text and email, he said.



The cafeteria and custodial workers covered by the contract, 23 members, got 2 percent in retro pay for the past fiscal year. The new three-year contract starts July 1 — with cost-of-living raises of 2

percent and 1 percent followed by 1 percent with a wage reopener clause.

During the coronavirus crisis, the cafeteria workers continued to make free breakfast and lunches through the spring for the Oxford children who have signed up for them. The students’ parents pick them up at the high school. The cafeteria members have gotten full pay, while dividing up the needed shifts among them this spring.

The cafeteria workers will continue to provide food for kids through the summer.

Custodians were on a part-time schedule, while getting paid for full time, earlier in the COVID-19 crisis. Now they are back in the schools full time as the next school year draws closer. Of course, plans for the fall opening of the schools are still being determined, as with the rest of the state.

The improvement in sick pay rules was a key part of the new contract, he said. Under the old contract, members had to use their personal and vacation days up before dipping into a sick bank funded by members.

For more on Oxford, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/07/16/essential-workers-in-oxford-ok-good-solid-contract/>. For more information on safety in the COVID-19 era, see <https://tinyurl.com/MassCOSH888>.



LOOKING UP: After the crisis, Holyoke Soldiers’ Home has the staff to properly care for the veterans.

Holyoke members ‘vindicated’

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vice president of Local 888’s Holyoke chapter.

“I have a sense of relief, because the truth is out there,” he added. “We were there for our veterans. We wanted to do our best for them. We cared deeply.”

“The state should have stepped in to do something sooner — before we had such a traumatic meltdown,” said **Erin Saykin**, a Holyoke Local 888 steward. Instead, she said, the higher-ups seemed to side for years with the home’s management, which had created an atmosphere of “constant bullying and retaliation.” And the staff had to contend with understaffing. See <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/07/16/weve-been-vindicated/> for a full report on Holyoke.

New chapter recruiting retirees

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, Local 888 is moving ahead with the formation of a chapter for retirees, with a membership cost of \$40 per year. For a form, [click this link](#).

Through this new chapter, Local 888 began offering dental coverage this month. The annual Open Enrollment period for the BCBS Dental Plan runs through the end of the month. For a form, [click this link](#).

For more info, email Linda Deluca at ldeluca.funds@seiu888.org.

Union urges racial justice, end to police brutality

The Local 888 Executive Board has adopted a resolution calling for racial justice and an end to police brutality — as Black Lives Matter marches and protests against harsh policing have swept the country.

The board's resolution: "The members of SEIU Local 888 join working people across the country to demand change. We condemn police brutality and the murder" of people of color, including indigenous people. The resolution said this violence offers "visible examples of the systemic racism that is deeply embedded in the fabric of our society and economic system."



Nationwide protests broke out soon after George Floyd's death in Minneapolis on May 25 at the hands of police. Derek Chauvin, now fired and charged with murder in Floyd's death, kept his knee on the deceased's neck for a reported eight minutes and 46 seconds.

The resolution added: "For the innumerable black and brown people who have died at the hands of racists, and due to racist policies — we call for justice. To the loved ones whose lives have been stolen: we grieve with you."

The resolution notes that "COVID-19 has shone a spotlight" on the inequalities in America. According to the Brookings Institution, "Among those aged 45-54, for example, Black and Hispanic/Latino death rates are at least six times higher than for whites."

For the full text of the Local 888 resolution see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/06/22/seiu-local-888-executive-board-calls-for-justice-and-an-end-to-police-brutality/>.

For more info about SEIU's support for the Black Lives Matter movement and increased police accountability, visit the international union's page: <https://www.seiu.org/blacklivesmatter>.



MassCOSH

'Know Your Rights' eyes safety, health

"[OSHA Has Been AWOL](#)," said the headline on The New York Times editorial recently. That's exactly the

problem that a recent Local 888 "Know Your Rights" seminar (via Zoom) took on — with an eye toward giving members some of the tools they need to return to the workplace as Massachusetts gradually reopens.

"Your power is in the union to get management to clean up unsafe workplace conditions," said Nancy Lessin, an advisor for the National Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health. "And the union is your members — that's who has the power."

It's often advisable to start small, when mobilizing a given workplace, she said, and then build up to working on the bigger issues.

See <https://tinyurl.com/COSHinfo> for a full report, or <https://tinyurl.com/MassCOSH888> for info.

Higher ed summit zooms in

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology along with Tufts, Boston, Brandeis and Suffolk universities attended the event. The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the world of higher education, leaving most staffers in higher ed working from home. Now many colleges are set to have students return to campus. Still, the threat of layoffs looms.

Plans for reopening colleges have been in flux. Meanwhile, debate is building over what workplaces should look like now to keep people safe in a pandemic. For example, Cambridge's MIT announced in June that fewer than 60 percent of undergraduates would be allowed to return to campus this fall. For those, in-person classes will likely end by Thanksgiving.

Boston University plans to reopen, with students getting the choice to learn online or in person. The school has, however, tended to shut workers out of the process of dealing COVID-19. See report on the summit, see www.seiu888.org.

