

The Spark

November 2020

Local 888
SEIU
Stronger Together

Pulling together in COVID times

On-the-job health, safety take center stage at convention

"During the global pandemic, our union's top priority has been protecting the health of our members and getting them the safety equipment that they need," said Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues**. "Nowhere was this more evident than at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home."



RODRIGUES

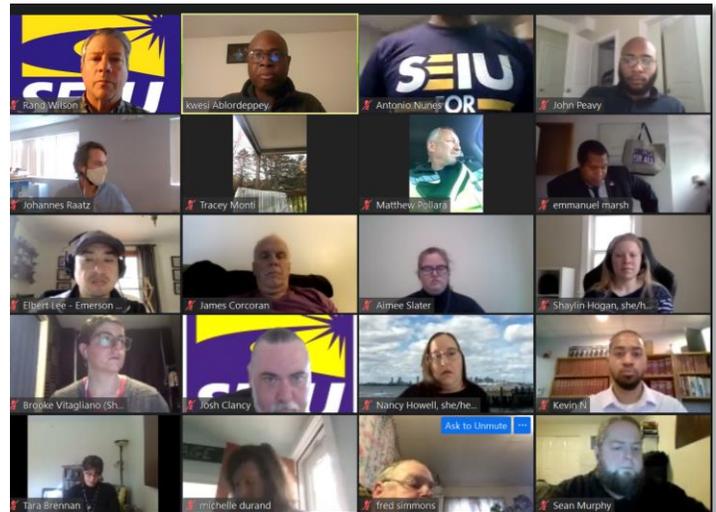
Rodrigues said: "I've never been so proud of our union, our staff and our members as I was during the crisis there. I'm proud of how our leaders stood up for the vets and for their co-workers."



DUDLEY

The local's president spoke about Holyoke and the state of the union during the recent Local 888 Convention. Over 150 members participated in the online event.

In contrast to the Holyoke Soldiers' Home, Rodrigues said, "management at most employers has been a good partner — working with our chapter leaders to ensure



MOVING ON: Over 150 members took part in the Local 888 2020 Convention, held on Zoom, which only highlighted the need for making workplaces safe.

access to PPE and safe workplaces."

In fact, the two top officials in charge of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home during the COVID-19 outbreak have been arraigned on criminal neglect charges related to the deaths of at least 76 veterans. (See related article, below.)

"It was Local 888 that gathered the evidence of gross mismanagement and first brought it to the attention of the governor," added Rodrigues.

See page 3 for more on convention

Holyoke Home's ex-honchos in spotlight



ABLORDEPPEY

The state is still grappling with the fallout from the deadly COVID-19 outbreak at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home. Local 888, which first exposed the crisis there, is looking to the future — and ways to keep frontline workers safe and prevent dangerous conditions in the workplace.

Local 888 passed a resolution at its recent convention saying employers should ensure that front-line workers are provided a healthy work environment. (See www.seiu888.org for more on the Local 888 2020 Convention.)

Kwesi Ablordeppey, chapter

See page 4 for more on Holyoke



RAMIREZ

New treasurer scrutinizes budget

“As this bizarre year ends, Local 888 will keep a focused eye on our assets and closely monitor our profits or losses,” said the local’s new secretary-treasurer, **Kevin Nascimento**. He said that the work of drawing up next year’s budget “is being approached from a conservative standpoint” with an eye toward “financial sustainability.”

Some of the financial challenges facing Local 888 “can be directly attributed to COVID-19,” he said. “For example, with schools being out, our dues revenue took a

hit. Things are rebounding and schools are opening back up. We will be watching closely to see how our finances develop for the remainder of the year.”

The new secretary-treasurer took office recently after being nominated by President Brenda Rodrigues and approved by the executive board, which he was a member of. Nascimento presented the



NASCIMENTO

financial report at Local 888’s 2020 Convention. Nascimento has been treasurer of his Local 888 chapter for the Brockton Public Library. He started out working for Brockton in 2006, when just a high-schooler, putting books back on the shelves as a library page.

He noted that union dues amount to 1.6 percent of a member’s base salary. Therefore, for example, overtime is excluded. *For the full report, see*

www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/new-treasurer-scrutinizes-budget/.



BOUND FOR COLLEGE: Local 888 held a raffle for college scholarships at its recent online convention on Zoom. The \$1,000 award went to **John Devane**, far left, and his mother, **Tracey Monti**, Blue Hills Regional clerical chapter. \$500 awards went to, above from left: **Abigail Leigh Soukup** and her mother, **Lynne**, Westborough town clerical chapter; and **Lenroy Sulph**, Boston Centers for Youth & Families chapter, and his daughter **Jameeka**; and at right, **Palesa Cochran-Allen**, of the Boston Admin Guild.



Workers’ pledge unveiled

In the run-up to the 2020 election, Local 888 asked state lawmakers to sign a “Pledge for Working Families”:

“I pledge to support workers’ rights to collectively bargain, I will use the power of my office to uplift working families, including Local 888 members, as well as people who are not. I also pledge to recruit my colleagues, friends, and family to do

the same so that we can reclaim our democracy and build an economy that works for us all!”

A number of politicians officially took the pledge at the convention. Among those signing the pledge were Rep.-Elect Erika Uytterhoeven (27th Middlesex), who Local 888 backed in her Democratic primary race. For a full list, see:

<http://www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/pledge-for-working-families-unveiled/>.

Convention pushes COVID, health and safety to forefront

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Ultimately, the state took a number of measures to stabilize the situation, including bringing in the National Guard (*For a full report, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/07/16/weve-been-vindicated/>*.)

Fittingly for the COVID-19 era, the convention keynote speaker was Carlene Pavlos, executive director of the [Massachusetts Public Health Association](#).

Local 888 Executive Board member and Emerson College chapter leader **Shaylin Walsh-Hogan** introduced Pavlos, who promoted the [State Action for Public Health Excellence bill](#) in the Legislature. It would reform the state's fragmented public health system.

Executive board member and Holyoke Soldiers' Home chapter leader **Kwesi Ablordeppey** introduced a resolution in support of the legislation that members voted to adopt overwhelmingly.

That was the first of three convention resolutions, which were all supported by the executive board and the convention as a whole. (*For the full text of the resolutions adopted by the convention, see <http://www.seiu888.org/convention/>*.)

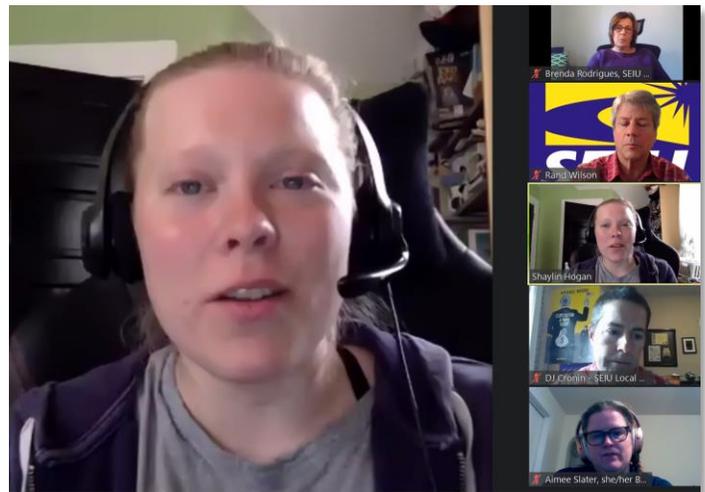
Jonathan Dudley, chapter member at the Montachusett Opportunity Council, introduced a resolution to "Protect the Vote, Protect the Results." The measure was in support of members taking action should one of the presidential candidates refuse "to concede if the results are clear."



VARGAS

On behalf of the Latino Caucus, Boston Public School's member **Jorge Vargas** introduced a resolution calling on Local 888 to draw up a "Membership Bill of Health Rights" necessitated by the pandemic.

Seven elected leaders and candidates for state office briefly attended the convention to recite a pledge to support workers' rights. *For more on the Local 888 2020 Convention, see www.seiu888.org*.



STEPPING UP: Shaylin Walsh-Hogan was one of the leaders for a convention workshop on higher ed.

Higher ed workers fired up

Higher education workers have continued organizing — both in their own Local 888 chapters and in not-yet-union workplaces — right through the pandemic. This has included having higher-ed workers meetings held on Zoom, hosting a workshop at the Local 888 convention and participating in a recent summit organized by the union.

During the convention, "members shared examples of successful alliances they have built on their campuses" said **Esther Brandon**, a steward for the Brandeis University librarians. And they shared an exercise on power mapping, which is used to identify individuals who could be persuaded to promote social change.

And of course, given the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, people also talked about the difficulties of communicating and working with allies during the pandemic, she said.

Brandon organized the "Brick by Brick: Building Alliances to Strengthen Your Union" workshop with the help of Local 888 staff and **Shaylin Walsh-Hogan**, a Local 888 Executive Board member and Emerson College chapter leader.

The Brandeis librarians won an impressive contract last year with help from the wider college community. *For a full report, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/higher-education-workers-fired-up/>*. *Christine Morgan is hosting Zoom meetings for higher ed workers. For more info, email her at cmorganj@seiu888.org*.

Local 888 signs up voters, nets victories at ballot box

In a remarkably successful election effort, Local 888 and its Committee On Political Action (COPA) helped register 489 members—contributing to a historic turnout in Massachusetts in the middle of a pandemic.

Local 888 Executive Board member **Emmanuel Marsh** said COPA is key to gaining and maintaining allies up at the Massachusetts State House. Thus the importance, he said, of having more than 400 Local 888 members making voluntary contributions to support COPA.



MARSH

Looking ahead, this means fighting for fairer pensions for members, including the Boston Police dispatchers, and the rights of public workers to unite with Local 888 and other unions for collective bargaining.

The state Legislature has failed to act on a bill that would extend this basic human right to the

workers in the Massachusetts public-defenders office, for example. About 750 attorneys, social service advocates, investigators, secretaries and other professionals work for the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS). They work on behalf of poor people in criminal cases, juvenile cases, child and family cases, and mental health and other civil commitment cases.

Most of the candidates that the Local 888 COPA endorsed this year won. See:

www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/local-888-signs-up-voters-nets-victories-at-ballot-box/.

More on election, Protect Results

President Trump prematurely declared re-election victory — and, falsely, claimed that votes counted after Election Day are somehow invalid. In anticipation of this, the international linked up with other groups in the Protect the Results coalition. Joe Biden has now been declared president-elect.

For info, see <https://protecttheresults.com/>. For details on Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues'** remarks, see:

<http://www.seiu888.org/2020/11/04/all-members-urged-to-help-protect-the-results/>.



Sean Murphy

SEAN MURPHY: Shown on Zoom at convention.

Dispatchers seek fairer pensions

One of the top issues for the Boston Police Department's dispatchers is getting their pension status upgraded to fit more in line with their

stressful jobs. For several sessions of the Massachusetts Legislature, members have been pushing for such a bill.

"We thought we had a good shot at getting the bill passed this year," said **Sean Murphy**, a city dispatcher and Local 888 chapter leader. "But then COVID-19 hit, and the bill kind of died."

The dispatchers are currently in the Group 1 level in the state pension fund — which is a classification for general employees, such as clerical workers. Under the Group 2 level, dispatchers could retire five years earlier and at a higher rate of pay than otherwise.

Murphy talked on the BPD dispatchers at the convention. *For the full report, see* <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/bpd-dispatchers-seek-fairer-pensions/>.

Holyoke case moves forward

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president and a CNA, and **Joseph Ramirez**, chapter vice president and a CNA, and others testified at the State House in last month on the outrageous actions of management and the grief over the sudden loss of so many veterans.

In addition, family members of residents of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home testified on the various hardships, outrages and grief that they have dealt with during the pandemic.

In a developing legal case, the two top officials in charge of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home during the COVID-19 outbreak were arraigned in Hampden County Superior Court early this month on charges related to the deaths of at least 76 residents. They pled not guilty and were released without bail.

For the full report on the Holyoke Home, see: <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/11/16/holyoke-homes-ex-honchos-in-spotlight/>.

