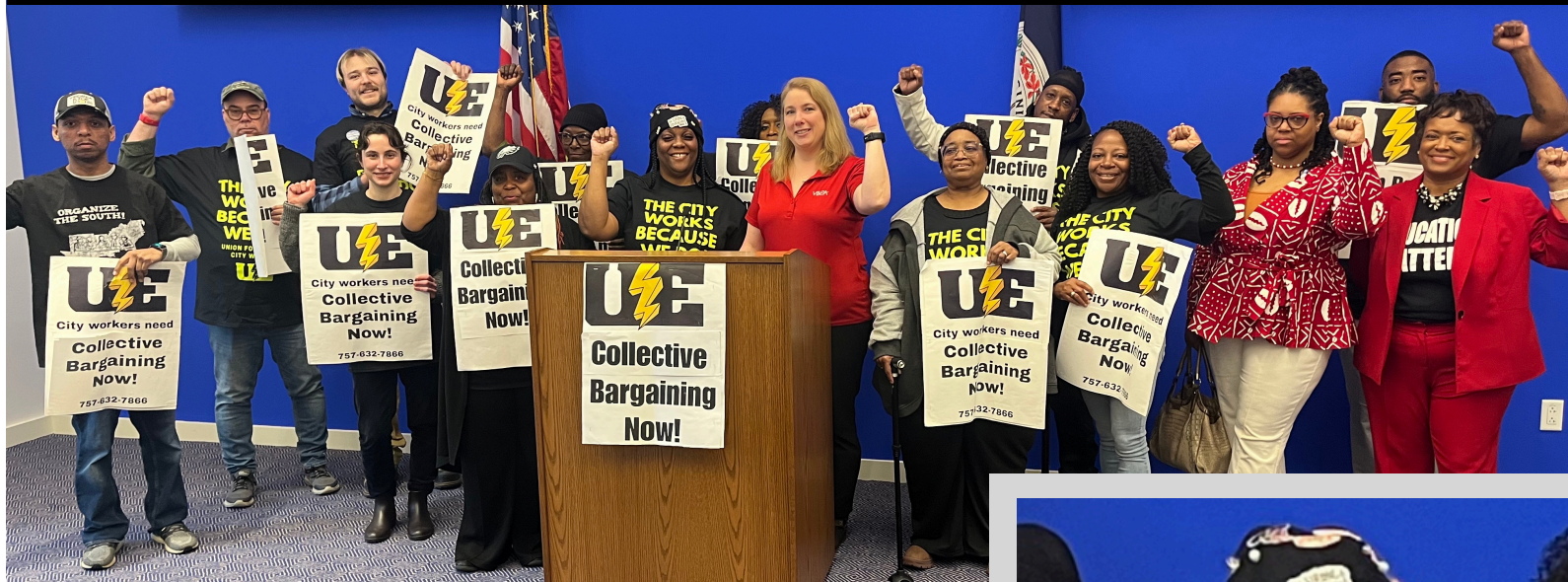


THE CHANGING TIDE

NEWSLETTER OF THE UNION FOR CITY WORKERS IN TIDEWATER, VA



UE & Union Coalition Political Action Advance Collective Bargaining Bill!

On Monday, February 16, UE members who are city workers in Norfolk and Portsmouth joined the Virginia Education Association lobby day in Richmond to push for passage of a stronger collective bargaining law – HB 1263 and SB 378. UE members had appointments with ten different Legislators throughout the morning.

The next day, the Virginia state House and Senate voted to pass the new collective bargaining bill, crossing a huge hurdle for it to become law. There are still problems in the bills – like a two-year delay and removal of higher education and home healthcare workers – that will need to be worked out in the conference committee and voted on again. The bill will then go to Governor Spanberger before becoming law.



"Collective bargaining is a powerful way to create an environment that is fair, transparent, and supportive, while also strengthening productivity. At its core, collective bargaining ensures employees have a meaningful voice and establishes clear policies that prioritize safety, accountability, and fairness,"

– **Tangela Randall**, a Social Service Family Services Specialist, City of Portsmouth.

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2025 YEAR IN REVIEW: WIN WITH UE!

Norfolk: Successful Petition Campaign Wins Back Step Pay Plan! Years-of-Service recognized!

Hundreds of workers in Public Works, Utilities and Parks signed a UE petition in early 2025 demanding the city bring back the Step Pay Plan. Workers then **met privately with city council members**. Then, on April 25, several city **workers rallied at the City Budget hearing**.



On top of the annual raise in 2025, **workers recieved their Step Pay in January 2026 that ranged from \$0.60/hour (\$1,248/year) to \$2.50/hr (\$5,200/year)**. While this is NOT ENOUGH, it does set in place a new pay structure that we can build off in coming years, and shows that WHEN WE FIGHT, WE WIN!

UE Stewards Overturn Dismissals and Suspensions, Turned Individual Grievances into Collective Campaigns

In 2025, UE helped several workers across the Tidewater area who were unfairly terminated get their jobs back and overturn unfair disciplines. We trained two workers to serve on grievance panels to defend our members. We coached many workers who came to us with issues on how to really win – turn an individual issue into a collective campaign.

Virginia Beach Human Services demand fairness in shift scheduling

Two workers, in separate facilities, came to UE about the unfairness of management picking and chosing who to allow to switch shifts, and whom to ignore. We brought workers together to launch a petition campaign demanding that they respect our seniority!

Newport News Human Services workers challenge overwork

Workers in Financial Services section of Human Services in Newport News have joined the union in big numbers because of stressful workloads. They are supposed to have no more than 25 open cases in folder, but workers reported having 80, even 140 open cases. Due to mismanagement, there has been a larger turnover and loss of experienced workers. In response, UE helped workers draft a letter demanding change. A total of 24 workers, nearly the entire department, signed the letter and delivered it to management, demanding a meeting.

PORTSMOUTH HUMAN SERVICES WORKERS ORGANIZE & WIN CHANGES!

What worked in Portsmouth wasn't noise, it was strategy.

Action taken by UE Members:

- Workers organized workplace meetings to hear concerns from co-workers
- Workers requested a meeting with the City Council members
- Workers drafted a PowerPoint presentation laying out the issues clearly, without naming individuals, and focused on operational impact.
- Workers attended rallies

What We Won:

- The city terminated a bad lease and saved roughly \$203K annually,
- Salaries were realigned to years-of-service,
- A new step pay plan was added that factors in education, motivation, and job impact,
- Safety and health committees were established,
- Additional support coordinator positions were created, which reduced pressure on frontline staff.



The core issues workers were dealing with were burnout from excessive caseloads and anxiety around health and safety. Once workers spoke up collectively and stayed consistent, management had to engage and caseloads became manageable not just acknowledged.

Key lessons workers learned:

1. Oversight of management matters.
2. Visibility creates accountability
3. Workers have to know their rights and stay engaged
4. Change came from team effort, not one person carrying it
5. Small, strategic actions can open the door to larger structural wins

Workers in other departments and cities can win changes on the job too, if we act TOGETHER and know our rights! **Let's organize!**

What does new Collective Bargaining law do?

In 2021, a new law came into effect that allowed city governments to pass collective bargaining ordinances. In the past five years, none of the city councils in Hampton Roads voted to pass such an ordinance. The new 2026 law puts that power in the hands of the workers. **If a majority of workers sign union cards, then can be presented to a state Public Employees Relations Board, which will certify the union, forcing the City to negotiate union contracts with the workers.** The new law:

- Allows local government workers to bargain for higher wages, safety, and improved working conditions,
- Forces the city to adhere to collective bargaining,
- Creates a new statewide Public Employees Relations Board for workers to file for union recognition and labor disputes.

Strengthening Our Position to Represent Our Members

As we prepare for the final bill outlining collective bargaining, we must start to consolidate our organization, build our membership, and train our workplace representatives.

Each of our UE membership needs to elect a steward council to begin taking up legitimate issues like unfair discipline and other issues our members face at work. All stewards will be trained. Stewards Councils will help us gain experience in representing our members and to learn what changes are needed in the grievance procedures in each workplace. With stewards, we become an active organization taking care of business whether the employer officially recognizes us as a union or not!

UE raises minimum wage to \$25/hr!



"Starting July of 2026, we will have a minimum wage of \$25 per hour for all city workers in Charlotte and

Durham, NC. Even without collective bargaining, we have been building a union for years. This shows that when we fight, we win!"

– **Dominic Harris**, Water Dept., Charlotte, UE Local 150 Treasurer



JOIN AND BUILD THE UNION!

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