

WELCOME TO THE LEGAL SERVICES STAFF ASSOCIATION



WELCOME TO LSSA!

You are now part of the Legal Services Staff Association Local 2320, a unit of the National Organization of Legal Services Workers (NOLSW), which represents about 4,000 legal services workers all across the country. NOLSW is a local of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

LSSA represents about 350 staff members at Legal Services NYC and MFY Legal Services. We are a wall to wall union, so LSSA membership includes paralegals, attorneys, receptionists, and support staff — basically everyone except for unit directors, project directors, and upper management.

Our Executive Committee

President	Sonja Shield	sshield@lssa2320.org
LSNYC Vice President	Richard Sanchez	vp-lsnyc@lssa2320.org
MFY Vice President	Anamaria Segura	vp-mfy@lssa2320.org
Treasurer	Jay Ackley	treasurer@lssa2320.org
Secretary	Sandra Gresl	secretary@lssa2320.org
Political Representative	Jasmin Torres	political-rep@lssa2320.org
Member at Large	Shardae Rookwood	delegate@lssa2320.org

Finding Us Online



lssa2320.org



facebook.com/lssa2320



twitter.com/lssa2320



instagram.com/savelegalservices



youtube.com/savelegalservices

Union-Only Listserv

Get your union news at lssa-2320@googlegroups.com! Give your delegate your personal email address so you don't miss anything.

WHY ARE WE THRILLED TO BE IN A UNION?

We can't be terminated without cause.

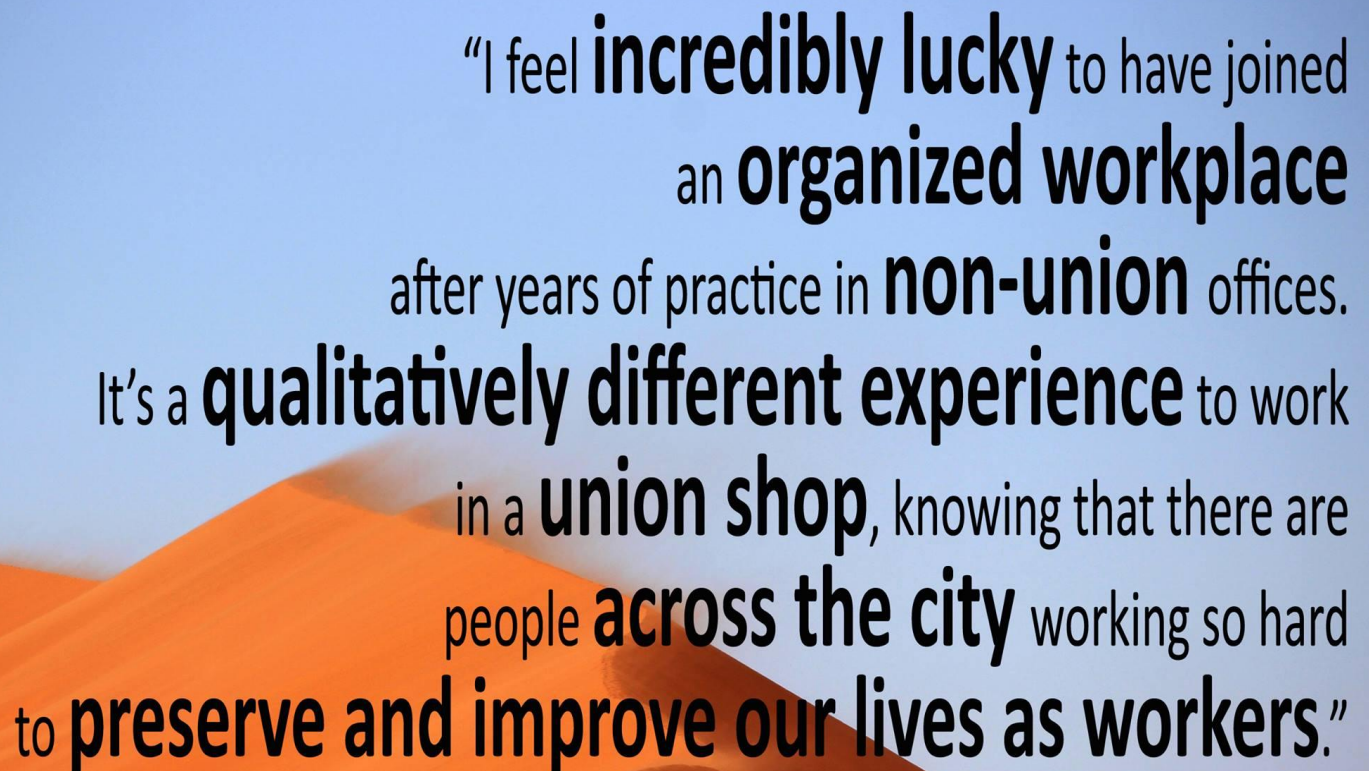
Even new staff don't have to worry that debate or a disagreement with a supervisor will result in a pink slip. If funding shrinks, there is a process that has to be followed and the organization has to demonstrate a good faith economic basis for any layoffs. If you get laid off, you have the right to prior notice, and you have the right to be rehired.

We have healthcare, parental leave, vacation, and sick time.

These cannot change during the contract, and they are not given out based on favoritism or job category. Everyone has these benefits and is entitled to use them without being hassled.

We never have to face a problem alone.

We have support in the event that an issue arises. If you are overwhelmed by work or haven't gotten sufficient training, you have delegates that can help you get the support you need to reduce your workload or learn your job.



"I feel **incredibly lucky** to have joined
an **organized workplace**
after years of practice in **non-union** offices.
It's a **qualitatively different experience** to work
in a **union shop**, knowing that there are
people **across the city** working so hard
to **preserve and improve our lives as workers.**"

- A New LSSA 2320 Union Member

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who do I go to with problems?

It depends on the problem. You should talk to your union delegate if there's an issue with how management is treating you or what they're asking of you, when you have a question about benefits, or think something isn't working the way it should be in your office. You should also talk to a delegate if you're having an issue with a fellow union member — we can help work it out without needing to get management involved.

If you have a question about the substance of your work itself, talking to your supervisor or your coworkers is usually a good bet.

How do I participate in the union?

For starters, you should attend your office's **regular shop meetings**. These meetings are an opportunity to discuss issues in the office, learn about what's going on around the city and provide your input to the delegates.

The union hosts regular **social events** – we hope you'll join us at those! And we have a softball team that you can join, or cheer on to victory.

We **lobby** twice a year here in New York City and up in Albany on various progressive issues – minimum wage, affordable housing, and more. All members are welcome to lobby with us, and training is provided, so no experience is required.

We have **committees** focused on specific issues (Hiring, Activism, 403(b), Health Care, Social Events, New Staff, etc.). If there's something you're interested in, ask your delegate how to get involved.

You can also attend trainings or **become a delegate**. Check out page 6 for more information on the role of the delegates.

What are my dues used for?

Our dues are our safety net. They give us the power to go on strike, because we use our strike fund to help pay rent, utility, and other expenses for members, so that we can keep fighting for as long as necessary. Our dues also pay for things like food for our meetings and social activities.

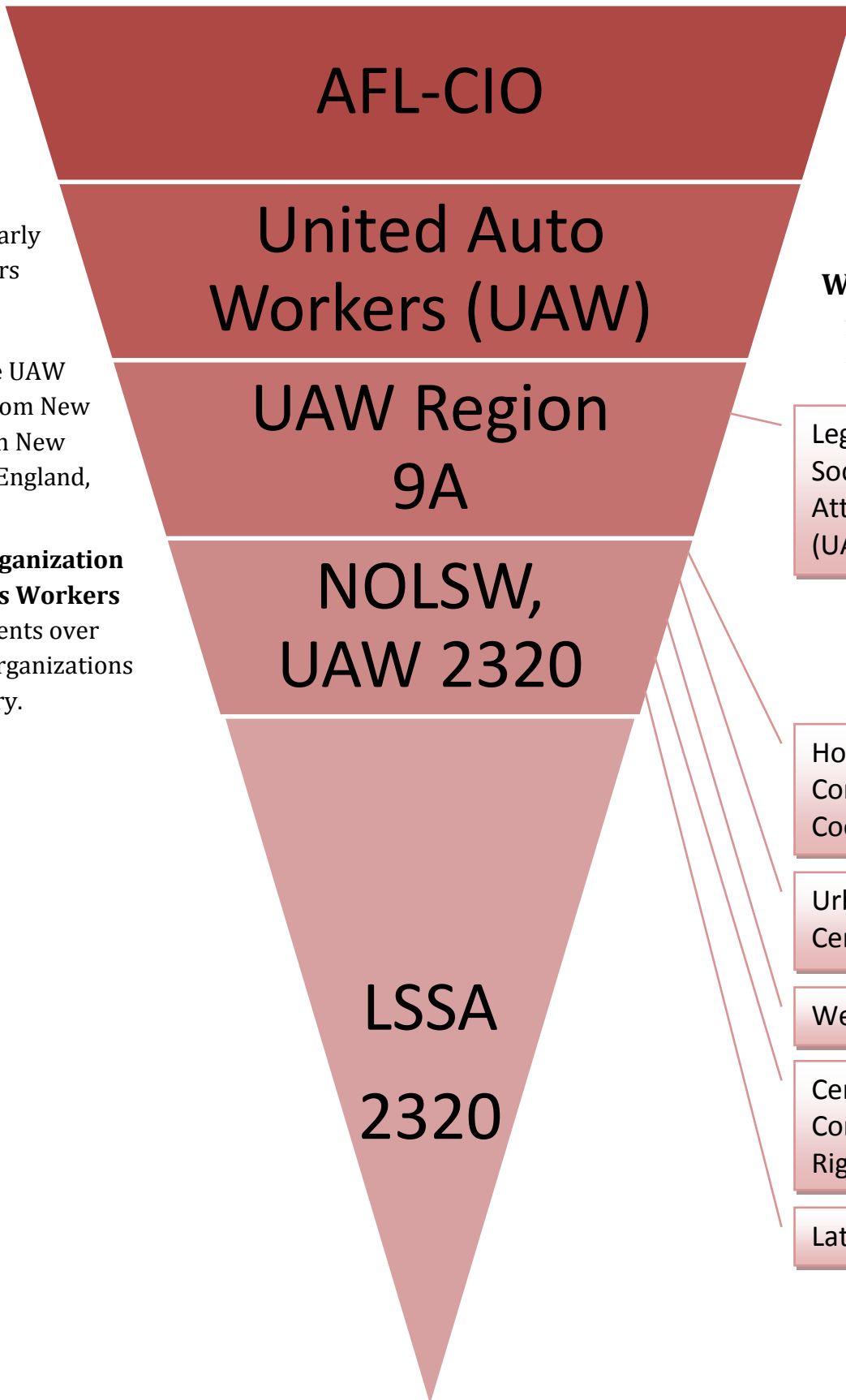
LSSA AND THE LARGER UNION MOVEMENT

The **AFL-CIO** is a coalition of national and international unions.

The **UAW** has nearly a million members nationwide.

Region 9A of the UAW includes locals from New York City, eastern New York State, New England, and Puerto Rico.

The **National Organization of Legal Services Workers** (NOLSW) represents over 100 non-profit organizations across the country.



Who else is in these unions?

Legal Aid Society Attorneys (UAW 2325)

Housing Conservation Coordinators

Urban Justice Center

Westside SRO

Center for Constitutional Rights

Latino Justice

So...WHAT EXACTLY IS A "UNION DELEGATE"?

A union delegate is an employee just like you – perhaps an intake officer, paralegal, or attorney. They have a job to do every day, and they answer to the same management that you do. The key difference is that the delegate has volunteered to take on the role of providing support and guidance to other members. Delegates get training and tools to help you and other employees solve problems at work!

Each shop elects some attorney delegates and some legal worker delegates, and tries to make sure that the delegates are spread out among the shop's locations. Larger shops get more delegates.

Delegates (and all employees) are protected when they stand up for your rights.

The job of a union delegate involves:

Your Delegates

You can and should ask questions of the elected delegates in your office.

Find a list of your delegates at:

Issa2320.org/members/elected-positions

Organizing and Mobilizing Members

This is the union delegates' #1 job. The strength of our union at any point in time is simply the total energy and support of the members who can be mobilized. When more members get involved, we can accomplish more at our workplaces as well as statewide. All the other work delegates do — representation, communication, and education — is done with an eye to strengthening the union and increasing involvement.

Communication

Delegates inform members about what's going on in the union by sending emails, handing out information, putting information on the union bulletin board, and talking to people. Your delegate also shares ideas and issues from your shop with the Delegates Assembly to help share information and identify and address city-wide issues.

Representation

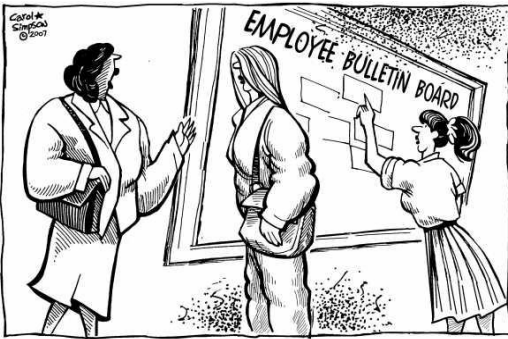
When you think you're in trouble.

If you have a meeting with management that you believe might result in discipline, you have the right to have your union delegate at the meeting. This is known as your "Weingarten Rights." Even if you don't think discipline is an issue, but you would be more comfortable with a delegate present, you can still ask and usually management will allow a delegate to join you at the meeting.

WEINGARTEN RIGHTS

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working condition, I respectfully request that my union representative or steward be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions."

When you have a problem that needs solving.



"I signed up for a self defense class...
the one called How to Win Your Union Grievance."

You may have heard of "filing a grievance." A grievance is an allegation that management has violated the contract. Sometimes filing a grievance is necessary to defend your rights, and a delegate will file the grievance for you. Your delegate may also have other ways, both formal and informal, for solving the problem.

Education

Your delegate will work to make sure all members understand your rights, the contract, and any important issues the union is working on.

Meetings

Delegates keep up to date on important union issues around the city by attending monthly meetings of the Delegates Assembly, generally held after work on the **first Wednesday of every month** at the union office (256 W. 38th Street in Manhattan). These meetings are an opportunity to discuss any issues affecting our members, learn what's happening in different offices, and organize events. At these meetings, delegates also vote on certain issues based on what you, the shop members, have discussed in your office. Delegates Assembly meetings are open to everyone, so if you're interested in learning more, you should try to attend!

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LSNYC CONTRACT

These are all rights that we have won by organizing together! You can get a hard copy of the contract from a delegate, or read it online at Issa2320.org/members/contracts.

Salary

Everyone usually gets two salary increases every year. Charts showing every position's salary are listed in the contract.

1. **Step increase:** You get a “step” increase every year, in the quarter containing the date that you were hired. If you are an attorney or a social worker, your first step is set by your year of graduation. Everyone else's step is based on your years of experience. So, if you start at step 5, after your first year of work you will move to step 6.

§ 18

Tip: Be sure to check because management doesn't always get your step right! A delegate can sit down with you to double-check your step.

2. **Raise:** If the contract provides for a raise in the contract year, you will get that raise at the start of the new contract year (usually July 1st). We negotiate these raises with LSNYC management at the beginning of the whole contract, which usually runs for three years.

Health Insurance

LSNYC offers two health insurance programs: Cigna and HIP. We must pay 1% of our salary towards the premium. Our children are covered without any additional cost, but our spouses usually are not, unless they have terrible or no health insurance. To figure out if your spouse is eligible, you should check the contract or ask a union delegate.

§ 5.1

403(b) Retirement Account



LSNYC contributes an amount equal to 7% of your salary into your retirement account after you've worked here for one year. But you can contribute from your own paycheck right away.

§ 5.2

Probationary Period

All employees are on probation for the first several months after they are hired (attorneys for six months, MSWs and paralegals for four months, and three months for everyone else). You can be fired during this period, but it must be for job-related reasons. You cannot be disciplined for exercising your rights under the union contract. It's rare for a probationary employee to be fired, and you must be given two weeks' notice. The union can help you file a grievance challenging the termination.

§ 10.2

Supervision and Training

LSNYC has extensive obligations to supervise and train staff.

Newly hired case-handling staff must not be required to handle your own caseload until you've received training and supervision sufficient to adequately handle the cases you've been assigned.

§ 12.4

The trials and hearings for all case-handlers during this period must be attended by a supervisory person.

Workloads and Caseloads

All staff are supposed to have **reasonable** and **equitable** workloads.

What does this mean exactly?

For **legal workers** – everyone except for attorneys – this means management must consider things like whether you can regularly complete your work within a 35 hour work week, and whether you can reasonably get everything done without skimping on quality.

§ 14.5

For **attorneys**, the starting assumption is that a caseload of 40 active cases is reasonable. But this is just the starting assumption, which you can rebut. A caseload of 40 HRA fair hearings is different from a caseload of 40 holdovers, for example.

You are entitled to a workload review whenever you would like one. Management is also supposed to do a workload review with you once a year. If you feel that your workload or caseload is still unreasonable, you have the right to file a grievance – either about your own caseload or along with other staff who are experiencing the same thing.

Overtime and Compensatory Time

Everyone except for attorneys and licensed social workers is eligible for overtime. That means that if you work more than 35 hours per week, you should be compensated at time-and-a-half for each hour over 35 hours.

§ 4.1

Comp Time:

If you work between 35 and 40 hours in a week, you get to take that extra time as comp time.

Example: You work 37 hours.

- **35** hours are paid as your regular salary.
- The **2** hours of overtime become **3** hours that you can take as comp time.



Overtime Pay:

If you work over 40 hours in a week, you should be paid for all the hours over 40 hours.

Example: You work 42 hours.

- **35** hours are paid as your regular salary.
- The first **5** hours of overtime become **7.5** hours that you can take as comp time.
- The **2** hours above 40 hours become **3** hours that you should get paid in your paycheck.



But remember to ask permission!

You have to get permission from your supervisor first, or (if it was an emergency) let your supervisor know you worked overtime as soon as possible. Otherwise you won't get paid for the time you worked!

Keep track yourself!



Management's timekeeping system often does not track our overtime correctly. The only way to know if you are getting the correct amount of comp time, or getting paid for the overtime you work, is to keep track of it yourself.

Expense Reimbursement

Paid dinner: If you work until 7:30pm, you can be reimbursed \$13 towards your dinner.

§ 17.3

Paid transportation home: If you work until 9pm (or 8:30 at an off-site location), you can be reimbursed for your cab fare home.

Job-related expenses: You have the right to be reimbursed for expenses such as job-related travel and telephone costs. This includes reimbursement for your bar registration fees! LSNYC will also pay for you to go to many trainings.

Child care: LSNYC will pay \$5/hour towards child care costs for non-case handling staff who work overtime. You must get prior approval to work overtime and tell your supervisor that you will need child care reimbursement.

These benefits have certain restrictions, so check the contract for more details.

Classes

The UAW's Education Fund provides free classes for us and our family members. Classes include GED prep, math skills, and training in various types of computer programs like Excel, Word, and Powerpoint. The Education Fund will also provide tuition reimbursement of up to \$840 per year for undergraduate classes or certifications.

§ 5.4

Discounts

As a union member, you're entitled to discounts from various retailers. One is AT&T, which gives a 15% discount to union members. Google "*UnionPlus*" for more deals!

Vacation Time

You get 23 days of paid vacation in the first year, and 28 days each year after that. Vacation time is **cumulative**, so any days you don't use one year carry over to the next.

§ 6.1

For the most part, you need approval to use vacation time, but management can't deny your vacation without a good reason. Seven of these days are personal days, which are vacation days you can take without giving advance notice.

Sick Leave

You get 18 sick days per year, which can be taken for personal illness or when needed to care for a child, spouse, domestic partner, or parent who has a serious health condition. Sick leave is **cumulative**, so any days that you don't use one year roll over to the next.

§ 6.4

You are allowed to take up to twelve (12) weeks unpaid leave for a serious health condition, or if you need to care for a child, spouse, domestic partner, or parent who has a serious health condition.

You are also entitled to paid time off after the death of a close family member.

Parental Leave

If you or your partner has a baby or adopts a child, you are entitled to parental leave. Both fathers and mothers are entitled to these benefits.

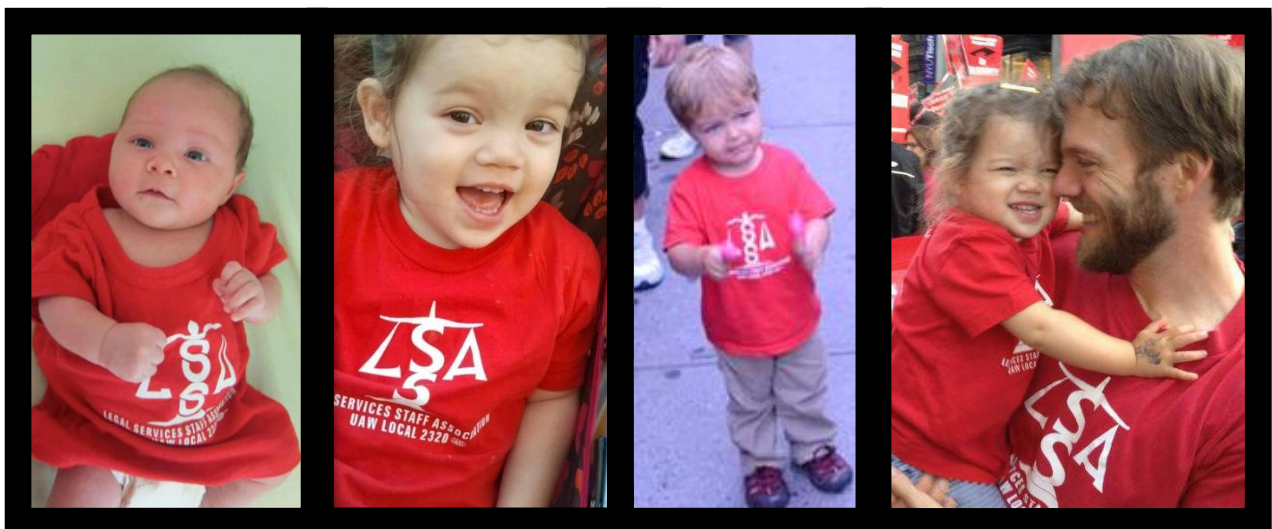
§ 6.9

Once you've been working for a year, you get 6 weeks of paid leave. If you've been at LSNYC for three years, you get 10 weeks of paid leave.

You can also use all of your accrued vacation time and up to 20 days of sick time for parental leave.

Employees are also entitled to a leave of absence of up to 12 months for a new child.

There are different ways to take parental leave, so if you're planning for a new child, check your contract or talk to a delegate for more information.

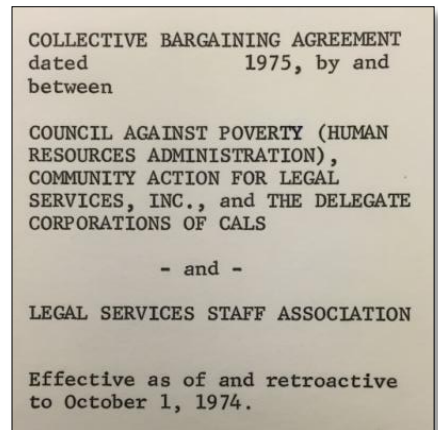


Check your contract for many more protections and rights!

OUR HISTORY

Legal Services Workers Organize

In 1972, Legal Services workers in New York City organized themselves as the Legal Services Staff Association. LSSA was determined from the very beginning to be a "wall to wall" union, with every union worker in every legal services office in the city belonging to the same local, regardless of job description. LSSA was one of the very first unions to be organized in the legal profession, which had previously been thought to be virtually unorganizable. LSSA immediately began helping to unionize legal services workers around the country.



First Strike

In 1977, the new union saw its first strike. Management scoffed at the union's contract demands and refused to take the union seriously. When the workers went out on strike, management was so taken aback that the strike resulted in a virtually total victory in little more than a week. Among the union's important gains was a contract provision staying any contested change in work rules until decided at arbitration.

Creating a Nationwide Union



In 1978, the National Organization of Legal Services Workers (NOLSW) was formally founded at a convention in Detroit. It now represents about 4,000 members, in over 110 non-profits, including about half of the Legal Services workers in the country as well as employees of other nonprofits like Heartland Alliance in Chicago. Its members in New York City include LSSA as well as advocates at the Center for Constitutional Rights, Latino Justice, and the Urban Justice Center.

Second Strike

In 1979, a second strike began against new work rules imposed by Executive Director Kathy Mitchell. Management sought to make an example out of LSSA, which was playing a key role in the dramatic nationwide growth of unionization within the Legal Services community. The strike lasted 11 weeks during the depths of winter. In the end, the union compromised on the implementation of new work rules, but defeated

other giveback demands, won retirement benefits for the first time, and made modest salary gains.

Joining the UAW

By 1979, there was also a growing understanding that connection to a larger organization would enable us to speak with more authority not only to management but to lawmakers. We sought a larger union that was widely recognized as democratically run, politically progressive, innovative and militant, and one that would accept affiliation while respecting a large degree of autonomy at the same time, in deference to the unique character of a legal workers' union and its issues.

In 1980 NOLSW voted to affiliate with District 65, a diversified union originally organized during the thirties among the warehouse workers, stock clerks, and goods handlers of New York's garment industry. At the same time, District 65 itself was in the process of affiliating with the United Auto Workers (UAW). The eventual bankruptcy of District 65 in the mid-1990's resulted in NOLSW becoming a direct part of the UAW as Local 2320.



The Reagan Years



In 1981, Reagan took office and within a few weeks mounted a "zero funding" campaign to eliminate Legal Services completely. NOLSW organized and fought a determined battle from the streets to the halls of Congress. We attended LSC hearings and helped coordinate a national Save Legal Services campaign. The wholehearted involvement of the UAW was decisive. Enough legislators were swayed to save Legal Services and to hand Reagan his first major political defeat since taking office.

Throughout the 1980's we continued to fight a series of battles against defunding and layoffs, limiting the damage and keeping legal services alive. At the same time though, our wages and benefits continued to erode, in part due to the lack of a seniority or "step" system.

Strikes of the 1990s and 2000s

In 1991, with significant new funding available for the first time in years, LSSA members were determined to win back losses. After five months of contract negotiations without a serious offer from management, we voted to go on strike.

With support from District 65 and the UAW, a substantial hardship fund, and strike benefits, we sustained our membership through a sixteen week strike that resulted in enormous gains for the union. We created wage scales with step increases based on seniority, obtained unprecedented wage increases, won a strong policy against sexual harassment, got retroactive pension contributions for our long-time members, and more.



In 1993, management attempted to undo the new step system of wages and to significantly reduce health care benefits, resulting in a month-long winter strike. Once again, LSSA organized successfully and held the line against givebacks. We also won domestic partner benefits for the first time.

1996 brought sweeping Republican control to the US Congress. Congress slashed LSC funding and imposed significant restrictions on the types of work that LSC-funded organizations could perform. This is why LSC-funded organizations cannot bring class actions, and cannot represent many immigrants. In 2000, we expanded the step system to provide regular raises for our longest-term staff.

In 2002, MFY Legal Services disassociated from Legal Services NYC. MFY staff promptly organized their own sub-unit within LSSA, and the following year, their fight for a new contract resulted in a nine-week long strike. It was actively supported by the rest of LSSA, garnered widespread support, and ultimately produced a contract much closer to the union's initial position than to management's.

Renewed Fight

In 2013, LSNYC management proposed massive cutbacks to our healthcare and retirement benefits. The LSNYC workers went on strike for 6 weeks to win back those cuts, as well as additional job security, gender identity and expression non-discrimination, and expanded parental leave.

In 2015, MFY workers went on strike in the midst of a bitterly cold winter. After over three weeks on strike in record-setting temperatures, we won a contract that ensures our clients will be served by experienced staff, that creates a family-friendly workplace, and that respects the experience and dedication of our paralegals and administrative support staff.

... and the rest is yet to come!

