

# insight

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS & FRIENDS OF PROTEC17

July/Aug  
2021  
Vol 26  
No. 4







### On the Cover:

King County Courthouse employees, union members, and community supporters 'March for a Safe Workplace' after a string of violent incidents in and around the public building in downtown Seattle. PROTEC17 members from both King County and the City of Seattle work in this space and have increasingly feared for their safety at work. Read more on p. 4. ■



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FOR  
OFFICE!**

## PROTEC17 Executive Board Election Notice

Nominations are now open for the following PROTEC17 Executive Board positions: Greater Northwest Trustee (currently held by Jessica Garcia) and City of Portland Trustee (currently held by Emily Tabachnick). The terms are three (3) years and will expire in 2025.

### Details:

- (1) Members at any employer except for the City of Seattle, the City of Portland, King County or the State of Washington are eligible to be nominated for the Greater Northwest Trustee position. Only members at the City of Portland are eligible to be nominated for the City of Portland Trustee position. The City of Seattle, King County and State of Washington Trustee positions will be up for election in ensuing years.
- (2) To be eligible for nomination to an Executive Board position, a member must have been in good standing in PROTEC17 for a period of at least six (6) months immediately prior to the nomination.
- (3) No member of PROTEC17 shall run for more than one Executive Board office concurrently.
- (4) Nominations must be in writing by the person making the nomination, and must be at the PROTEC17 office, 2900 Eastlake Avenue East, Suite #300, Seattle, Washington 98102, by 5 p.m. on Tues., Oct. 5, 2021.
- (5) Names of all nominees, except those who declare in writing that they decline the nomination, will appear on the ballot.
- (6) Candidates may submit a statement of up to 200 words and a photo of themselves. These will go out with the ballot and must be submitted to the union office by 5 p.m. on Mon., Oct. 11, 2021.
- (7) An electronic ballot will be emailed to each member in good standing at his/her last known email address.
- (8) The ballots will be counted after 5 p.m. on Wed., Nov. 17, 2021.

To request a paper ballot, or if you have any questions regarding the election, please contact the PROTEC17 Election chair at: PROTEC17 Election Chair, 2900 Eastlake Avenue East, Suite 300, Seattle WA 98102, or union@protec17.org.

## insight

Karen Estevenin, Managing Editor; Deidre Girard, Editor. Insight (ISSN 1093-1694) is the official publication of Professional and Technical Employees Local 17 (PROTEC17). Insight is published bi-monthly by PROTEC17, 2900 Eastlake Avenue East, Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98102. Periodicals postage paid at Seattle, Washington. Postmaster: Send address change to: Insight - 2900 Eastlake Ave. E., Ste. 300, Seattle, WA 98102-3012. www.protec17.org

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Karen Estevenin  
Executive Director

## Community care is the highest form of safety



he dog-days of summer are upon us and along with the dry warm sunshine comes another sort of heat — the need to ensure safety and well-being for all. This issue of *Insight* is filled with stories about how PROTEC17 union members are working together to create safety. *But what does safety really mean?*

When I was a teenager, my mother enrolled my sister and me in self-defense classes. I learned some things. But to this day I do not feel safe walking in certain situations at night. I remember explaining this (as many women have done) to a male colleague and he was dismayed that this was something that I and other women continually experienced.

More recently, I was talking to a friend who stated that as a black woman she feels safety is “overrated.” She then explained that when growing up she never held any expectation of feeling safe – not with the police, not walking down the street, not during many times in her young-adult life – and she still doesn’t much of the time now.

Perhaps a sense of safety is not something to get or even give. It is certainly not transactional – one can only *experience* safety. But safety, truly experienced, includes health and well-being in such a way that we do not have to think about whether we are safe. This kind of safety is freedom – the ability to live without fear and experience health and well-being, to live life to its fullest. *So how do we create this?*

I think the answer to that question lies not in individual attainment, but in the kind of environment we can collectively build together. The fact that many people do not realize that others are uneasy in certain situations, or always, is not okay. To overcome this, we need to link arms and work towards this broader notion of health and safety.

As union members, we understand collective action and the power it builds. To start, we can listen more, have the courage to tell our stories, try to understand why others may feel a certain way, and unite our struggles. We have plenty of work to do on this front. And, in the stories that you will read about in this issue, we are beginning to do just that. And if there is anything I have learned from this pandemic, it’s that we have the ability to make tremendous change very quickly. In a way, we need to keep that urgency. True safety is not going to be given – it’s going to be created by our collective care for our community.

In compassion and solidarity,

*Karen*

## Welcome new PROTEC17 Organizer Jessica Olivas!



**P**lease join us in welcoming new Union Organizer Jessica Olivas to the PROTEC17 staff! Olivas joined us in May and will be working primarily in the Portland area, as well as the City of Seattle, helping us to grow our union.

Olivas started her organizing career working with immigrant rights groups in Arizona and at her alma mater, the University of Washington, organizing with students around budget cuts. In 2011, she joined the labor movement, working for United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 21 as an internal and external Organizer in the grocery and healthcare industries.

After six years, Olivas left UFCW21 to travel through Europe and see the world – a lifelong dream. Since returning, she has worked for Teamsters 117 as a Union Representative, and as an Organizing Manager for PSE/SEIU 1948 – the union that represents classified employees at our public schools.

Outside of work, Olivas enjoys traveling, writing, and spending time with her family in eastern Washington. But her greatest adventure has been her two boys, Malcolm and Porter.

On her new job at PROTEC17, Olivas says: “I can’t wait to meet everyone, and I look forward to building power and strength for our members and density in our industries by organizing, organizing... and more organizing!” ■

## ‘March for a Safe Workplace’ highlights safety issues at King County Courthouse

**I**n response to a violent assault that occurred at the end of July in the King County Courthouse in downtown Seattle, court employees and supporters held a rally and march on Fri., Aug. 6.

The ‘March for a Safe Workplace’ served to highlight the ongoing safety issues in and around the courthouse, and to demand a safe environment for all people.

PROTEC17 members from both King County and the City of Seattle who work at the courthouse have seen a dramatic rise in harassment and assault incidents in the last several years. They want the Courthouse to be a safe space, not just for themselves, but for all members of the public who use and rely on services in the courthouse, including jurors, witnesses, people who need protection orders, people who are using the legal system or social services in the building, and others, who deserve a public space free from violence.

After the recent incident, employees were upset to see the County’s initial response was to remind people who enter the courthouse to be “aware of their surroundings”, which prompted blowback about victim blaming.

At the rally, which started at the King County Administration building, nearly 300 attendees – many of whom wore teal t-shirts to stand in solidarity with survivors of sexual violence – listened to speakers who talked about the need for more security, more targeted resources, and more mental health services to address the needs of the community using the courthouse and those surrounding it. After the rally, attendees walked down the street and around the Courthouse.

PROTEC17 continues to advocate for a safe workplace for all members. If you have concerns about your safety in the workplace, please contact your Union Representative. ■



PROTEC17 at the ‘March for a Safe Workplace’ on Aug. 6.



## COVID-19 continues: King County, City of Seattle, and State of Washington require vaccines for employees

**A**s the COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate communities across the country, including in the Pacific Northwest, employers throughout our region – both public and private – are beginning to require coronavirus vaccinations for their workers as a condition of employment.

On Aug. 9, three of PROTEC17's biggest employers – the State of Washington, King County, and the City of Seattle – announced that these agencies would require COVID-19 vaccines for all employees who do not have religious or medical exemptions, effective Oct. 18. This will impact over 7,000 PROTEC17 represented positions.

The mandate is a coordinated effort among Governor Jay Inslee, King County Executive Dow Constantine, and Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, to tackle the spread of the Delta variant – a more contagious mutation of the original virus.

Similarly, PROTEC17 is working with the Washington State Labor Council and other unions on a coordinated approach to protect the health and safety of workers while ensuring they have a voice in these important decisions that impact their livelihoods.

"We encourage all of our members who can get vaccinated to get the vaccine – this is both a workplace safety issue and a public safety issue," said Executive Director Karen Estevenin. "But we also have an obligation to advocate on behalf of all members, including those who have not yet been vaccinated. That's why we are demanding to negotiate over the impacts of vaccine requirements. This is one of the key benefits of having a union – workers have a voice on policy changes like this."

As a change in working conditions, the vaccine requirement is prompting many unions, including PROTEC17, to submit a 'demand to bargain', which opens



*Photo courtesy of Daniel Schludi, Unsplash.com*

up negotiations with the employer to determine how the new policy is implemented. From determining exemption policies, to providing paid leave to get the vaccine and for recovery, to outlining separation procedures for those who do not qualify for exemptions, these negotiations will help determine when and how union members get vaccinated.

As required by law, employers must maintain a safe and healthy working environment. In Washington, this currently includes verifying the vaccination status of employees in the workplace, and ensuring that unvaccinated staff members wear a mask while working indoors. In Oregon, Gov. Brown reinstated the indoor mask policy statewide on Aug. 10.

PROTEC17 continues to work to ensure that employers provide workplace options that keep everyone safe, and that our members' voices are heard in any decision-making that affects a healthy and safe workplace. If you have questions or

concerns, please reach out to your Union Representative. ■

**“As a union, our number one priority is that PROTEC17 members have a healthy, safe, and productive working environment. We will be working with our labor partners and employers to ensure that our members have a say in these important decisions about vaccinations.”**

Karen Estevenin  
PROTEC17 Executive Director

**Find more COVID-19 info at: [www.protec17.org/covid19](http://www.protec17.org/covid19)**

## With Labor input, Oregon adopts emergency rules to protect workers from heat and wildfire smoke this season

**N**ew statewide rules to protect workers from excessive heat and wildfire smoke went into effect this summer in Oregon.

The emergency adoption of these policies serves as a way to help people who work outdoors in increasingly more commonplace extreme weather and climate events.

The new rules will be in place for six months while the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in Oregon works on more permanent rules. Since spring 2020, Oregon OSHA has been working alongside labor – including PROTEC17 – and other community stakeholders in an effort to expand worker protections against this new threat.

Under the new rules related to air quality that went into effect on Aug. 9, employers are required to change work schedules or relocate work whenever possible when air quality levels reach 201 – considered in the ‘very unhealthy’ zone on air quality indexes. If workers are going to be exposed to air quality at that level or above, then employers must ensure that

workers wear N95 respirators. This year, employers are allowed to provide KN95 masks as long as air quality levels are below 499.

Employers will also be required to maintain an adequate supply of respirators for air quality levels of 101 or higher (considered unhealthy for sensitive groups), develop a communication system to alert workers to air quality hazards, and to train workers on the health risks of wildfire smoke and emergency procedures by Aug. 16.

Wildfires across California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia last year brought hazardous air quality to many regions and showed that poor air quality issues were not properly addressed in workplace regulations. Many workers who performed work outside remained on the job with limited protections.

In addition to wildfire smoke, rules protecting workers from extreme heat went into effect in July. These will require employers to provide access to water and additional breaks on days when outside

temperatures exceed 80 degrees. For workers living in labor housing, employers will need to block windows and offer fans at no cost when indoor temperatures are over 78 degrees. Several workers in both Oregon and Washington died of heat-related illnesses after record-breaking temperatures in June across the region.

“The strong temporary emergency rules that resulted from this process showed the important influence that Labor had in making workers’ voices heard on these critical issues,” said PROTEC17’s Research Director and Oregon Legislative Advocate, Elliot Levin, who participated on the committee.

PROTEC17 will continue to work with the OSHA committee to make sure these rules are as protective as possible at the state level. We are also working with the City of Portland to discuss their implementation of these rules, as well as expanded wildfire smoke guidance for management and supervisors during heat and smoke events that maintain the health and safety of all employees. ■

**“The strong temporary emergency rules that resulted from this process showed the important influence that Labor had in making workers’ voices heard on these critical issues.”**

Elliot Levin, PROTEC17 Research Director and Oregon Legislative Advocate



People at the Pacific Ocean during the wildfires in 2020. Photo by Steven Weeks via Unsplash.

**For more news visit our website at: [protec17.org/news](https://protec17.org/news)**

## PROTEC17 members in law enforcement come together to talk about the future of public safety

**P**ublic safety members from various employers across Washington state convened on July 29 for the first meeting of the PROTEC17 Law Enforcement Task Force. As workers who've dedicated their lives to safe communities, the group aims to address how our union can support them as well as to help shape the future of law enforcement.

With members representing the Washington State Patrol (WSP), the Seattle Police Department (SPD), Tacoma Police Department (TPD), and Seattle Municipal Court, the committee of 15 talked about their jobs, their challenges, and the opportunities they have to be a part of positive change.

For many, a career in public service and safety is a calling and a privilege.

"I care about people and want to do my best to help them stay safe," said Matt Corey, a Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Officer at WSP in Spokane who enforces laws and regulations on our roadways to keep drivers safe. As a former member of the U.S. Coast Guard, he added: "Also, I like serving our community, state, and country."

For Jonny Fong, a Video Specialist II with the SPD, he wanted to use his skills to give back to the community.

"I like being able to use my skills to provide transparency to our citizens and to help people interpret information in the most accurate way possible," said Fong, who processes and enhances forensic, crime, and other video, including officer body camera footage, which is being used with increasing frequency.

After the civil unrest of last summer in response to several incidents of police brutality around the country, public safety professionals found themselves the focus of calls for drastic changes to policing and community safety. PROTEC17 Executive Director Karen Estevenin brought the task force together with the aim of using the



**"Even in the midst of the changing face of law enforcement, I still love what I do; I love what we stand for; I love our mission. And I'm up for the transformation that's ahead of us so that we can best work with the community."**

Jeanette Blackwell, PROTEC17 member and Office Manager, *City of Tacoma Police Department*

collective wisdom of those performing the work to contribute to solutions and a way forward. The group has already created a survey for PROTEC17 members working in law-enforcement related positions and will dive into the results in the coming months.

Many of the task force members agree that more resources need to be devoted to mental health response and treatment, and to strengthening relationships with the community.

Jeannette Blackwell, a 30-year employee at TPD who has newly joined our union, knows the importance of



**"I believe strongly in community-oriented policing. My ideal vision for a safe community is one where all people feel comfortable seeking help from law enforcement and there is a high level of mutual respect and understanding."**

Matt Corey, PROTEC17 member and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Officer, *Washington State Patrol, Spokane*

community relationships. Blackwell keeps her own community connections strong so that she can link the Chief of Police – to whom she provides direct support – to the right leaders. Her ideal safe community is one of equity, empowerment and companionship: "a community full of folks who want to see each other do well."

If you are a public safety member who would like to join the Task Force, please reach out to Executive Director Karen Estevenin at [karen@protec17.org](mailto:karen@protec17.org). ■

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