

OCT 2  
2013

UNION UPDATE



# Member experience shows need for AWOL bill

## Registered nurse nearly fired from prison job; AB 855 would allow judges more discretion in AWOL cases

Petra Ogwurumba thought she did everything right when arranging time off from her state job to visit her seriously ill mother in Nigeria.

Ogwurumba, a Roman Catholic nun who worked at the California Medical Center in Vacaville, filled out all the correct paperwork and took all of the required steps for an emergency family medical leave before traveling home to a remote village in Nigeria.

“It was not until I was already in Africa, that I received an email notifying me that my request was rejected, and I was considered AWOL from my job,” Ogwurumba said. “I had limited access to a phone or email while I was taking care of my mother. I tried for weeks to work things out, leaving messages for my boss and sending emails, but I was not successful.”

### Union intervention

Upon her return six weeks later, the state began its efforts to terminate Ogwurumba, who is a member of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy. Ultimately, she kept her job because the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) backed down after intervention by Local 1000’s legal team.

“My union did very well in this case because I kept my job,” said Ogwurumba, who devotes her entire state salary to help fund her order and their charitable work. “This would not have happened if the prison had been more flexible and understanding.



*“It’s great to have a strong union, but we really need a change in state law because the state can act very unfairly...”*  
—Petra Ogwurumba, Nurse  
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

It’s great to have a strong union, but we really need a change in state law because the state can act very unfairly in situations like mine.”

### Stronger legislation pending

Ogwurumba’s case highlights the need for AB 855, Local 1000-sponsored legislation that is currently on the governor’s desk awaiting his signature.

AB 855 would strengthen the due process rights of our members who face termination because of unexcused absences from work.

The bill would allow an administrative law judge to consider whether the state properly initiated an AWOL proceeding and to consider the reasons for a member’s absence as a part of that proceeding.

### Take action now

To send a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown urging him to sign AB 855 and other legislation important to those who provide state services, go to [seiu1000.org/politics-legislation](http://seiu1000.org/politics-legislation)

## Contract enforcement training

Stewards gain new tools to protect our hard-earned rights

Local 1000 stewards are armed with a deeper understanding of our new contract along with new tools to help them better represent our members at work.

At six different locations up and down the state, stewards and Local 1000 staff gathered on Saturday, Sept. 21 for extensive training on the expanded rights and provisions we achieved under our new contract, which was ratified and signed into law in July.

“Our goal is to better prepare our stewards to protect and empower their colleagues in the workplace,” said Tamekia N. Robinson, Local 1000 vice president for organizing/representation, who coordinated the training sessions. “Our contract is only as strong as the stewards who help enforce it. This training is an important step to build a more effective steward network.”

The training sessions included review of dozens of contract changes that affect our members with an emphasis on workplace issues—such as how to deal with a bullying boss—now that our dignity clause has been expanded.

“We were able to acquire a lot of practical information about the contract—why we obtained these changes as well as how to implement the contract,” said George

Cornell, a Caltrans employee who serves as vice chair of Bargaining Unit 11.

In addition to practical matters, such as filing effective grievances, the training examined important contract articles, including a dozen new or continuing joint labor management committees. Those committees allow Local 1000 to continue work on important issues between rounds of contract bargaining.

One such committee is the Budget Solutions Task Force, a joint effort between Local 1000 and the state to reduce expenditures on private vendor contracts.

“We are working to empower more members, so they can help us identify and report on cases where



**“We were able to acquire a lot of practical information about ... how to implement the contract.”**

**—George Cornell, Caltrans Vice Chair of Bargaining Unit 11**

the state is wasting money on expensive outsourcing contracts for work that should be done by our members,” said Marie Harder, a longtime outsourcing activist who works as a senior information systems analyst for the California Department of Public Health.



### Resource Center

Monday-Friday  
7 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
866.471.SEIU (7348)

### Website

[seiu1000.org](http://seiu1000.org)

### Connect with Local 1000

Facebook  
[facebook.com/seiu1000](https://facebook.com/seiu1000)

YouTube  
[youtube.com/seiu1000](https://youtube.com/seiu1000)

Twitter  
[twitter.com/seiu1000](https://twitter.com/seiu1000)

