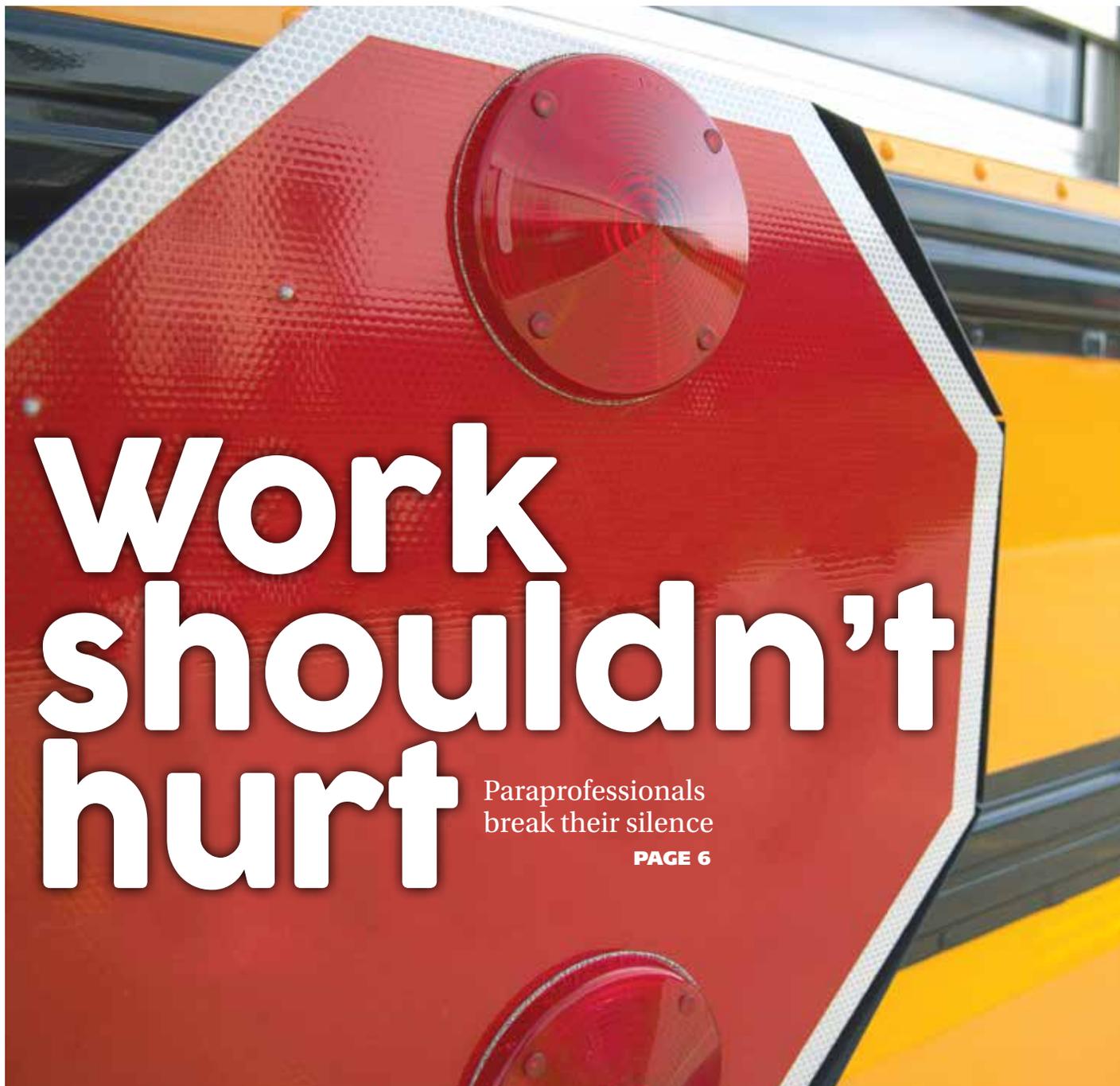




# PSRP Reporter

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PERSONNEL



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break their silence

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**OUR MISSION**

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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**Paraprofessionals: Then and now**

A quick look back during our 100th anniversary



Pioneering paraprofessional Velma Hill, right, shows fellow paraprofessional Veronica Washington how New York City was organized.

WE NOW HAVE multiple generations of paraprofessionals working in New York City as members of the United Federation of Teachers.

It wasn't always that way. Back in the late 1960s, paraprofessionals, led by Velma Hill, began a long, hard push for recognition within the UFT. In 1970, after nearly half a year of voting and counting ballots, and despite resistance from certain teachers who did not want to accept less-educated colleagues or people of color into the union, the paras won. Within a month, they demanded a big pay increase (from about \$2 an hour), plus pensions and paid leave.

In a short new AFT video, you can watch the inspiring account of Hill, who describes what it was like to work as a para in the 1960s, starting at \$50 a week, and to organize the

paraprofessional chapter in New York. By 1972, this leader had taken her work to the national level, organizing and chairing the AFT's first Committee on Paraprofessionals, which hosted its first conference in 1973.

Hill tells her story to Veronica Washington, a member of the union's newest generation of paras working with special needs children. Despite a hectic schedule as an educator and a mom, Washington believes in the power of her union. She finds time to contribute—a little here, a little there.

"We need you," Hill tells Washington, and it's true. We need you—and every AFT member who works at a school or college.

**aft 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**  
 1916-2016  
 HONORING OUR PAST AND INSPIRING OUR FUTURE  
 Watch the video, *Paraprofessionals: Then and Now.*  
[bit.ly/PSRP100](http://bit.ly/PSRP100)

**Vacancy leaves Supreme Court in limbo**

THE DEATH of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in February is having a profound impact on cases still before the court. These cases included *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a lawsuit that tried to weaken unions and deprive working people of their voice on the job.

Even though a 4-4 deadlock after Scalia's death allowed a lower court's decision to stand, resulting in a win for unions, AFT President Randi Weingarten says our union must keep engaging and mobilizing every

AFT member in supporting public education. She also is urging the Senate to move forward in considering Merrick Garland, a centrist appeals court judge whom President Obama has nominated to serve on the court.

**Tell the Senate:**  
**#DoYourJob**  
[bit.ly/SenatesCOTUS](http://bit.ly/SenatesCOTUS)



## In praise of school breakfast

LORRETTA JOHNSON, AFT Secretary-Treasurer

GROWING UP IN POVERTY is one of the greatest threats there can be to a child's ability to thrive and grow. Financial stress and not having family resources for healthy food, decent housing or other essentials impede children's cognitive development and their ability to learn.

You don't have to look far to see it. All across the United States—in cities like Detroit and Flint, Mich., Washington, D.C., and my hometown of Baltimore—our children, our babies, are living in poverty and coming to school with empty bellies.

I spend quite a bit of time in classrooms talking to educators, and when you bring up the School Breakfast Program, you can see their faces light up. For them, this program, which started as a pilot in 1966 and has steadily grown in scale and reputation since then, is a lifeline for the students and families they serve each and every day.

From my time as a teacher's assistant in the early '60s through today, the School Breakfast Program has improved the odds for our children living in poverty and has significantly lessened the impact of childhood food insecurity. Our members take very seriously their role in ensuring the success of school breakfast programs because they know they can be the difference between a focused child who is ready to learn and one who is lethargic and struggling with hunger pangs. Because of their commitment, they're trying innovative ways to serve their students—for example, through grab-and-go meals or hallway breakfast bars with fresh fruit.

During this past National School Breakfast Week in March, I was thrilled to join the Food Research and Action Center and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in expressing the AFT's love for school breakfast. As we outlined in our 2015 "Helping Children Thrive" report, AFT members stand ready to continue and build on our work to improve children's

nutrition and end child hunger.

Feeding our hungry students isn't just the right thing to do. It has proven to reduce absenteeism and improve student performance. Full bellies mean better well-being, less impulsiveness and hyperactivity, and even reduced depression and anxiety in our students.

Act, the nutritional content of school meals has been steadily improving. We are thrilled that the USDA and Congress are increasingly dedicated to training all school personnel.

As research shows, across the country, we are improving students' access to school breakfast. Through programs like the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision, we're mak-



LONGVIEW NEWS-JOURNAL / KEVIN GREEN

**Our members take seriously their role in ensuring the success of school breakfast programs because they know they can be the difference between a focused child and one who is struggling.**

Alfreida Jamison, a middle school educator and member of the Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers in Illinois, explains this connection in the "2015 Kelly Report on Health Disparities in America."

AFT members are standing up for consistent access to hot meals with healthy ingredients prepared from scratch for our students. Thanks to the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids

ing great strides to connect high-need communities with new support, and to help students eat more wholesome foods.

AFT members look forward to continuing to plan, implement and improve school breakfast programs, because when these programs succeed, we know we're doing right by our students and giving every child his or her best shot at success.

Have you heard?

AFT publications  
are going  
all-digital!

BLOG



THE PUBLICATION you are holding in your hands is one of the last editions of *PSRP Reporter* to appear in print. Starting soon, *Reporter* will have its new home on a union-friendly site called Medium, at [www.medium.com](http://www.medium.com).

We don't want to lose track of you. We need to know the best ways to reach you—this means how you want to be reached and engage with your union. To that end, we've created a technology survey just for PSRPs so we can learn your preferences. Complete this short survey, right now if you can: [go.aft.org/PSRPtechsurvey](http://go.aft.org/PSRPtechsurvey). Then keep your computer, tablet or smartphone handy so you can sign up for *PSRP Reporter* on Medium.

**Here's where you can find AFT PSRP, in a nutshell:**

- Our main website, [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)
- School and college support staff, [www.aft.org/PSRP](http://www.aft.org/PSRP)
- Your monthly PSRP e-newsletter, [aft.to/Reporter](http://aft.to/Reporter)
- AFT on social media:
  -  [AFTunion](https://www.facebook.com/AFTunion)
  -  [@AFTunion](https://twitter.com/AFTunion)
- Your technology survey, [go.aft.org/PSRPtechsurvey](http://go.aft.org/PSRPtechsurvey)
- The latest member of the family, Medium: Sign up at [www.medium.com](http://www.medium.com), then search for and follow Schoolhouse Voices, Voices on Campus and, of course, PSRP Reporter.

Need the right resources to support student success?

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You are critical to the success of your peers, teachers and students. When you need resources and peers to support you, come to Share My Lesson. Developed by the AFT, Share My Lesson brings together the collective wisdom of a million educators to assist you when you need it—**for free**. Get ideas for:

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POWERED BY AFT 

# Union members key to Hillary Clinton's success in upcoming primaries

Candidate for president needs every AFT member to go all in

CALLING HER THE CHAMPION working people need, thousands of AFT members are speaking with friends, family and neighbors about their support for Hillary Clinton in her march toward the Democratic nomination for president. The labor vote for Clinton has made the difference so far, and now it's essential for us, as union members and education advocates, to get out the vote. From now on, every vote will count.

Whether it's knocking on doors in their communities or joining phone banks to call fellow union members, AFT members know that their personal involvement, along with the help of their local AFT affiliates and other labor unions, is key. Over the first weekend in April, for instance, school and college support staff attending the annual PSRP conference turned out in force sporting their Hillary Clinton T-shirts, and during the event's ever-popular Solidarity Night, they staged skits showering love on Clinton and skewering her Republican opponents.

That's because education support staff know how this election will drive such im-

portant decisions as who will serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, which makes crucial decisions about what happens to public schools and colleges. Over and over, Clinton has shown how much she cares about students and working families. That's why from here on in, we're *all in*.

"I am proud to have been endorsed by the AFT and the NEA," Clinton said at a debate in March, building on her all-in statement the month before: "We've got to stand up for unions and working people who have been at the core of the American middle class."

More than 20 of America's biggest unions have underscored their support for Clinton. Since late winter, when she won Democratic primaries in seven states where union support was pivotal, Clinton has made steady progress toward the nomination. Her gains in key states include Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina and Ohio.

"Secretary Clinton has proven herself as the fighter and champion working people and their families need in the White House," says a statement by unions representing

millions of working people, including the AFT.

While media outlets remain enthralled by violence, threats and other horrible behavior on the Republican side, Democrats and our allies are talking about real issues affecting working families. The AFT and our state affiliates have joined progressive leaders to highlight the importance of electing Clinton.

"She's a dreamer and a doer," says U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, adding that Clinton is "a good progressive who has great values, but she knows how to get things done. That for me is what it's all about."

JANET CENTURY PHOTO

Join the Twitter talk in support of Clinton using hashtags **#AFT4HILLARY** and **#ImWithHer**.



Members are volunteering their time for Hillary Clinton, who says: "We've got to stand up for unions and working people."

## Why I'm for Hillary

BY SHELLYE DAVIS

Here's what we don't need. We do not need Republican-controlled statehouses enacting laws forcing women to have medically unnecessary transvaginal ultrasounds in order to have an abortion. I, for one, do not want Republican-controlled statehouses legislating Planned Parenthood and abortion clinics out of existence through political, not medical, rules. We do not need a Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives and Senate defunding Planned Parenthood.

We do not need waiting periods for abortions, political regulation of women's clinics or gynecological limitations on insurance coverage. Unfortunately, we have them in at least 24 states.

Think of the harm if the House defunds teaching hospitals where doctors learn to perform abortions safely. Imagine a president like Donald Trump, who thinks it's impossible to rape your wife.

If this is not a war on women, then nothing is. Hear me clearly. Republican men want to control women's reproductive rights.

Here's what I do want. The Violence Against Women Act needs to be made into a permanent law with no sunset. But the House tried to block it from being reauthorized even temporarily. We need laws that ensure that women can get contraceptives and abortions covered by insurance. We are only partly there. We need women to have equal pay and equal opportunity in employment. We need women, especially Democratic women, at all levels: in statehouses, in governors' chairs, in the House and Senate.

Most of all, we need a woman president. We need a woman president who will fight for women's rights. Hillary Clinton is such a fighter. We need a woman president who will make appointments to the Supreme Court—and there will be quite a few in the next eight years—of jurists who respect the rights of women. Hillary Clinton would make such appointments.

But we need more. We need you, and everyone you know, to throw your weight into opposing the regressive laws pushed by the GOP. We need you to speak out, to support candidates who share our views, and to support Hillary Clinton for president



*Excerpted from a blog by Shellye Davis, a paraprofessional and co-president of the Hartford (Conn.) Federation of Paraprofessionals. This blog originally appeared in Schoolhouse Voices, a forum for AFT members on Medium.com.*

# Work shouldn't

## Oregon members begin delicate task of bringing school violence into the open

BY JASON COX

NOBODY EVER WANTED to talk about it. Years went by, and we would hear special education paraprofessionals confide in low tones how they were getting hit, kicked, spat upon, scratched and screamed at by their students.

By their own students. Then they would fall silent, and no amount of coaxing could entice anyone to say more about it. They love their kids and don't want to "get them in trouble." In some cases, they've told their stories to a supervisor and not been heard.

Then, last year, paraprofessionals in Oregon started coming forward, and the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) started telling their stories through a blog site and a three-part series in the *OSEA Journal*.

Here are a few highlights:

A student wearing heavy boots kicked Beth (not her real name), a veteran special ed assistant, in the head. Her concussion left her with a stutter and post-traumatic stress.

Despite another student's individual education plan (IEP) that said no one was to come within four feet of him, special ed assistant Christopher (again, not his name) was knowingly ordered to sit next to this student, who gouged the para's eyes, dislodging his surgically implanted lens. Eventually, the lens had to be removed, leaving him visually impaired.

Many paras like Monica McCanna have been punched and kicked by students who outweigh them by 100 pounds or more.

"I love my job, and I love this kid," says McCanna. But the job wipes her out for anything else "because I have to be so hypervigilant."

Beth says she was well trained in how to de-escalate potentially violent situations. That's not the main problem. The main problems are understaffing, uneven medication of students and little or no support from the district.

When Christopher, now reassigned, reported continuing violence to the district's special ed coordinator, he was told that violence comes with the job.

This is wrong. On so many levels.

Wrong for the paraprofessionals, of course. But also wrong for other students, who tell paras they fear for their own safety.

Finally, it is wrong for administrators to stand by and do nothing. They need to quit blaming paras and back them up. One accused a para of intentionally provoking students so they would be sent home. Others accuse paras of being insubordinate—threatening discipline or termination—for being asked for reassignment. Still other administrators let parents point fingers at staff. Why on earth would a para want to "set off" a student?

When protective equipment is promised, it needs to be delivered. "Nothing got ordered for any of our people last year," says paraprofessional Kathy Forbes, who worked in a room where a student tried to strangle a teacher.

Schools need to include classified employees in IEP meetings. Paraprofessionals know their students better than anyone—sometimes even better than parents.

Administrators need to provide useful and consistent training. Such training is more common today than it was years ago, but it's spotty and can't cover everything.

When school employees are hurt, school administrators need to help. Not roll their eyes when paras ask for a sick day to recover from bruises and sprains. Not give paras the runaround on workers' compensation—Beth's district evaded providing answers for months on her workers' comp claim. Only after OSEA hired a lawyer was the claim approved.

So how can we change this?

OSEA members have taken a giant first step by speaking out. Now, together, we have to expand and systematize this process by pushing to enact laws and regulations as well as contract language and enforcement mechanisms.

Federal and state laws require employers to keep workplaces safe. The problem is that elementary and secondary schools are designated as "safe workplaces" and partially exempt under federal law. That's because the "safe" designation came before schools were required to accept nearly all students—even those with a history of violence—and during a bygone era with more staff, like counselors.

That's why no federal agency knows the extent of the violence. That's why in Oregon, school districts don't have to report most injuries inflicted on staff.

And that's why we, through our union, must be our own best advocates.

\* \* \*

Forbes says members often don't want to fill out an injury report. They say it's not a big deal, they don't want to be a burden, or they weren't hurt that badly. But there will never be enough staffing or support if there's no record of injuries. Principals say: "If we don't know something is wrong, how can we fix it?"

So let's start reporting. Let's get this stuff on the record.

Not that it will change things right away.

In Oregon's Redmond School District, employees told OSHA they were harmed routinely. The school district discouraged them from reporting; it didn't want bad publicity. But a subsequent OSHA investigation found incident reports stuffed into desk drawers or filed away and not dealt with.

Eventually, the truth comes out.

Our members are coming forward. Last December, OSEA activists got the ear of their governor. They told Gov. Kate Brown about how a few students hit, bite and kick other students and educators, and about the union's Work Shouldn't Hurt campaign.

What's next? The governor is assembling a task force. The union is preparing a statewide survey and convening a summit. With the data they gather, our members in Oregon, together with their coalition, will help craft state legislation on workplace safety.

And lastly, they want the attention of OSHA, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and they plan to get it by collecting stories around the nation. That's where you come in. Contact the AFT with your story using the email address in the box at right.

*This article was adapted from a three-part series Jason Cox, a communications specialist for OSEA, wrote for the OSEA Journal. AFT editor Annette Licitra contributed to the story.*

# hurt

## When work does hurt: PSRPs speak out

A LOT OF ATTENTION is paid to bullying at school, but most of that attention is on student-on-student bullying. Not a lot of attention is paid to the harm inflicted on staff, which ranges from verbal abuse to outright violence.

In a discussion last fall among AFT PSRP leaders, about half raised their hands when asked if they had personally been threatened physically or experienced violence on the job at school or college.

Special ed paraprofessionals, support staff who run in-school suspension classrooms, campus security employees and school transportation workers are particularly at risk—as are noontime monitors who discipline students and break up fights. One PSRP leader from Florida, whose main job is handling workers' compensation claims, said that every week in her district, school bus drivers and monitors are beaten up.

In fact, the three fields at highest risk of workplace violence nationwide are healthcare, law enforcement and education, notes Amy Bahruth, an assistant director with the AFT department of health, safety and well-being. "That would probably surprise a lot of people," she said, "that we rank right up there with law enforcement." It tells you something, she added, when 30,000 educators and support staff took the time last year to fill out a 70-question AFT survey on the quality of work life and work-related stress.

A leader from New Mexico said a new problem she's seeing for staff is their doctors' diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder—but PTSD is not accepted as a condition for workers' compensation. "This is a prevalent problem," she said.

"Violence is violence," no matter where it comes from, said a PSRP leader from Colorado. "We need to stand up and speak out."

## TELL US your story

CHANGE WILL COME only if lawmakers and the public clearly understand what is happening in our classrooms. Your story is vital to ending the climate of violence and fear.

Email [alicitra@aft.org](mailto:alicitra@aft.org) to share your own experiences with Annette Licitra, a member of the AFT PSRP communications staff.

# Your Home Is Waiting



*A Union of Professionals*

**AFT +**  
Member Benefits

The Union Plus Mortgage program is one of some 25 benefits available to help union members. The program is for union members, their parents and children. Benefits of the program include mortgage hardship assistance to help protect members' homes in the face of financial hardship. With Union Plus, a mortgage is more than a monthly payment. It's long-term protection for everything your home means to you.

**Learn more: [UnionPlus.org/AFTMortgage](http://UnionPlus.org/AFTMortgage)**