

# SEIU/NAGE

## Plan for the Future

### 2008

As many of you know, Local 1985 was put under an International Union Trusteeship in 2006. Approximately one year ago, SEIU/NAGE made an agreement to help service the membership of Local 1985 while it was under trusteeship. Earlier this year, the members of Local 1985 were merged into SEIU/NAGE. In August, leaders of Local 1985 from around the state were told that there would be a plan for Local 1985 members by November 15.

The information that follows is the plan we would like you to look over in order for you to make decisions about how we go forward to build the union and represent our members in the future.

#### **Who is SEIU/NAGE?**

Welcome to SEIU/NAGE—also known as Local 5000 of the Service Employees International Union. SEIU/ NAGE members live and work in 43 different states from Hawaii to Illinois to Florida.

The National Association of Government Employees was created in July 1961, primarily for the purpose of protecting the rights of World War II veterans in government employment. Although it was established as a federal employees union, the composition of NAGE changed significantly in 1970 when the International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO) affiliated with NAGE, creating a sophisticated union of public sector employees.

Unit 6, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts professional employee bargaining unit, was the first state group to choose NAGE as its union, in 1977. NAGE now represents close to 22,000 Massachusetts state employees.

In 1982, NAGE affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and in the early 1990's, the International Association of EMTs & Paramedics (IAEP) was created to represent employees in emergency medical services.

In Georgia and Tennessee SEIU/NAGE already represents 3,000 members including police officers in Atlanta, Clayton County, Gwinnett County, and East Point; Exchange Service Employees at the Air Force base, City of Atlanta professionals, Fulton County Sheriffs and Chattanooga City employees. Recently SEIU Local 679, which is a private sector local in Georgia, also merged with SEIU/NAGE to consolidate our Georgia power.

## **SEIU/NAGE Mission** (from the National Constitution and By-Laws)

We are the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE), SEIU Local 5000, an organization of members united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society.

We are public workers (federal, state, county and municipal), police officers, correctional officers, health care workers (nurses, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians), office workers, professional workers, and allied workers. We seek a stronger union to build power for ourselves and to protect the people we serve.

Women and men of every race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, physical ability and sexual orientation, we are the standard bearer in the struggle for social and economic justice begun nearly half a century ago by shipyard workers who dared to dream beyond their daily hardship and to organize for economic security, dignity and respect.

### **Our Vision Is of a Society ...**

- Where all workers and their families live and work in dignity
- Where work is fulfilling and fairly rewarded
- Where workers have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them
- Where workers have the opportunity to develop their talents and skills
- Where the collective voice and power of workers are realized in a democratic and progressive union
- Where union solidarity stands firm against the forces of discrimination and hate and the unfair employment practices of exploitative employers
- Where government plays an active role in improving the lives of working people

## **Transition to SEIU/NAGE—The Need for a Plan**

We know that the transition from SEIU Local 1985 into SEIU/NAGE has not been as smooth as it could have been. Local 1985 merged into NAGE earlier this year in response to some difficulties the local was experiencing. In August we had a meeting in Macon that union activists from around the state attended. At that meeting, a commitment was made to have a plan for the future by November 15. A letter was sent to all members to that effect.

Over the past couple of months we have spoken to a number of leaders from various employers around the state to see what people want as we move into the future. This document is a plan that we would like to lay out for the membership. We understand that you will want to discuss this

plan as a group so **we will conduct a series of membership meetings around the state in the next few weeks so that you may have your questions answered.**

After the meetings are completed and people have had an opportunity to discuss the plan, we will hold a vote so that you may decide if you want to continue this relationship with SEIU/NAGE. We look forward to working closely with everyone to continue to build stronger organizations for public sector employees in various part of the state.

## **The PLAN: Goals for Georgia**

Based on conversations with union members over the past couple of months, the following is a proposed plan for our members.

### **GOAL 1: GROW THE MEMBERSHIP**

Union members are the best organizers of their co-workers. It is each of you who is best positioned to grow your union on the job. We need to continue the tradition of growing the union in each sector in order for our members to have influence on the job with employers. As your membership grows, your resources will also grow, allowing you to expand your plans and programs.

Our motto needs to be: **Each one, reach one.** If every member gets one more member to join, we can double our numbers. Because our union density is low in each of our units, we need to set a goal of growing the membership in all city, county and board of education employers to at least a simple majority of 50%. Many of you have stated that numbers matter—and this continues to be true. In the state division, we should strive to have at least 10% membership in DHR, DOC, DJJ, DOL, DOT etc. DHR and DOC are currently our biggest divisions but they still have a long way to go.

### **GOAL 2: PROVIDE GOOD REPRESENTATION**

- We need a well-trained body of union stewards to handle problems in the workplace at the initial stages. We will need to ask people to step up into these worksite leadership positions. Our experience is that high functioning stewards can prevent minor problems from becoming major issues.
- We will develop literature that explains the representation process to the members and also the protocol for accessing a staff attorney. There are currently two full-time labor attorneys on the NAGE staff in Georgia.
- Staff attorneys will hold meetings in each Local/Chapter to answer questions and become familiar with the membership.
- Union staff organizers will have regular routes to help do organizing and membership building, leadership development and representation.

### **GOAL 3: IMPROVE MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING (MOUs) *(where we have them)***

An MOU is an agreement with the management of certain counties and cities that gives us our union rights, including the right to representation. MOUs are usually granted by the political body that you work under, for example, the Mayor/City Council or County Commissioners. Where possible we need to develop regular labor-management meetings to discuss and resolve issues.

#### **GOAL 4: BUILD A STRONG STEWARD STRUCTURE**

- Recruit and train new stewards (worksite leaders). Ideally we should strive to have one steward for every 25 members
- Hold regular steward meetings
- Develop a “train-the-trainer” program for stewards to train new stewards

#### **GOAL 5: DEVELOP A STRONG POLITICAL PROGRAM**

- Target specific political races for 2009
- Conduct voter registration
- Conduct GOTV/phone banking/canvassing
- Monitor legislative session. Keep members informed about legislative action
- Conduct a lobby day in Atlanta at the Capitol

#### **GOAL 6: INCREASE RESOURCES**

The International Union subsidized Local 1985 for many years with both staff and money. That subsidy is no longer being contributed to your efforts, and as a result, there are fewer resources to work with. That does not mean we cannot have an ambitious plan, but it does mean that it may take a while to achieve all of our goals. As your membership grows your resources will grow. We need to continue to:

- Recruit more grassroots leaders
- Raise dues in some areas based on members’ desire to do more
- Continue to build our COPE Committee

#### **GOAL 7: IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS**

- Produce regular newsletters so that members receive updates
- Update the website regularly. This means you have to get stories to the Atlanta office for publication. We have already added a Georgia web site at [www.nage.org/Georgia](http://www.nage.org/Georgia) that can be easily accessed.
- Send newsletters to Stewards and activists to distribute by hand. This is the best means for worksite leaders to be in touch with members.

#### **A State Council: A Structure to Move the Plan Forward**

To move the plan forward, we need to work together and develop a structure that promotes local autonomy *and* cooperation among locals. To do so, we will form a State Council consisting of the president from each local.

- The State Council will meet at least 3 times per year to discuss areas of common interest among the locals, including a political program
- The State Council will make decisions on the spending of the State Council budget
- The yearly budget for the State Council will be equivalent to one month’s dues from all the locals in the State Council. As membership grows, the budget will grow.
- NAGE will fund a State Council staff position

- The State Council should save enough money from its budget in 2009 and 2010 to be able to send delegates to the NAGE National Convention in 2010.
- The State Council budget will pay for half the cost of arbitrations
- The State Council will convene a meeting of the membership at least once per year
- The State Council will rotate the Chair of the meetings from among the Local Union Presidents

### **Locals in the State Council**

Members working for each individual employer will vote as a group on whether or not to continue a relationship with NAGE. At that time you will also vote on whether or not you want to have a free standing local of just your co-workers or if you want to be part of a local that includes other employers in your area.

For example, in Macon/Bibb County, you could have a Local that includes City of Macon, Bibb County Government and Bibb Board of Education, or each of those units could have its own local. You will decide how you want to be organized. The presidents of each local will sit on the State Council.

### **What's Next?**

We will be conducting meetings in all areas of the state over the next few weeks to talk about the plan. Notices of the dates, times, and locations of the meetings will be posted on the web site at [www.nage.org/Georgia](http://www.nage.org/Georgia). Nancy Lenk, a longtime labor and union activist, will be the “point person” for members and should be contacted with any immediate questions or concerns. Her contact info is:

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### **YOU DECIDE!**

After you've had an opportunity to review this plan, discuss it with your co-workers and fellow members, and attend meetings to learn more about it, *you* will decide how you will move forward. You will have the opportunity to vote on the following:

- 1) Do you want to continue to be associated with SEIU/ NAGE as we move forward, and are you committed to making this plan work?
- 2) Would you like to be part of a regional local or would you like your workplace (employer) to be a free-standing local union?