

Fix the Unfairness

By Beth Albert



Standing Together For Public Education

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Sheniqua Hairston-Kitchings saw injustice and she acted. The Montclair High School Educational Support Professional, who serves as co-building representative, attended the NJEA Lobby Day in Trenton on January 17th. Along with MEA President Petal Robertson, Hairston-Kitchings went to Trenton to support legislation for Chapter 78 relief.

“Several of my colleagues have expressed their concerns and shared their stories of how rising health care costs due to Chapter 78 have affected their families and overall way of living,” said Hairston-Kitchings. “It was important to me that I attend, gather information on what we can do locally to raise awareness, and also be a resounding voice.”

The goal of the NJEA Lobby Day was two-pronged: encourage legislators to pass the NJEA-sponsored bill providing Chapter 78 relief; and to raise awareness of the job injustices facing Educational Support Professional (ESP) members, who are often outsourced.

With 100 NJEA members from across New Jersey at Lobby Day, Hairston-Kitchings and Robertson delivered the NJEA’s state petition, which had more than 116,000 signatures.

“We were able to get an additional legislator to support the NJEA bill that very day, and another legislator has signed on since our meetings,” said Robertson. “There were too many of us in Trenton to meet one-on-one with the legislators, but we lined the hallways, so they knew we were there.”

Next steps include continuing to educate and mobilize members around this issue. For a start, every Wednesday is a “Wear Red for Ed” day.

“We hope to see every MEA member wearing red on Wednesdays,” said Robertson. “Together, with the strength of our union, we will raise awareness and push for the relief from Chapter 78 that we all deserve.”



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