

panorama

UNITED FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



Proposed updates to PA Constitution, By-Laws

It has been several years since the MVCC Professional Association Constitution and By-Laws were comprehensively reviewed and updated. During a session at the NYSUT Community College Conference this past fall, we recognized the importance of revisiting these documents to ensure they accurately reflect the current structure and work of the PA. Following that discussion, the PA Executive Board conducted a thorough review and is now proposing several updates for membership consideration.

The updates are outlined in an email sent by MVCCPA President Erica Brindisi on April 7, 2026, with the subject line “Proposed Changes to PA By-laws and Constitution.” This provides all members the chance to review the proposed changes in advance of the vote at the membership

VOTE AT THE NEXT PA MEETING

Tuesday, April 28, 2026
4:30 p.m.
Payne Hall, room102

meeting on Tuesday, April 28. The primary focus of these updates is to ensure that our governing documents accurately reflect the current structure and work of the PA. Over time, several committees have been actively functioning but were not formally listed in the Constitution or By-Laws. These proposed revisions formally recognize those existing committees by incorporating them into both documents.

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Panorama is the voice of our local. In addition to the PA website (www.mvccpa.org), email, and bulletin boards, Panorama is a principal vehicle for bringing you, on a regular basis, information on the views and activities of our members.

We welcome articles by, for, and about PA members of union-related issues and concerns as reflected in NYSUT and AFT activities as well as in the purpose and functions of the PA's standing committees: Community Outreach, Education & Training, Grievance, Internal Communications, Political Action, and Research & Records.

All submissions are subject to the review and acceptance of the Editor and/or Internal Communications Committee. We do not accept articles that make personal attacks and we reserve the right to edit articles for length. We look forward to hearing from you.

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MVCC Professional Association

PRESIDENT
Erica Brindisi

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR
Robin Saxe

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WEBSITE
www.mvccpa.org

PREZ DESK:

Fix Tier 6: A Conversation with MVCCPA members



Erica Brindisi

Fixing Tier 6 is quickly becoming one of the most important issues facing public employees across New York State. At MVCC, over half of our PA membership is in Tier 6, meaning many of our PA colleagues contribute more, work longer, and receive less favorable retirement benefits than those in Tier 4 for doing the same work. When we talk about “Fix Tier 6,” we are referring to addressing these inequities in the current system.

The differences between Tier 4 and Tier 6 are clear and significant. Under Tier 4, members contribute 3% of their salary for only 10 years and can retire as early as age 55 with full benefits. In contrast, Tier 6 members contribute between 3% and 6% depending on salary and must continue contributing for their entire careers. They are not eligible for full retirement benefits until age 63. In short, newer employees are asked to pay more, work longer, and receive less than colleagues hired just a few years earlier for doing the same work.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with fellow union members Shannon Crocker and Aaron Fried, who attended the Fix Tier 6 Rally in Albany organized by NYSUT, which brought together labor unions from across the state.

When I asked them what the day felt like, they said there were over 15,000 public employees in attendance, and the event was very well-organized. Aaron added that seeing the strength of other unions, especially the size and presence of the UFT, really stood out. One of the most memorable moments they shared was the firefighters' drum and bagpipe band, which brought a strong sense of unity and pride to the event.

As our conversation continued, I asked what resonated most from the rally. Both Shannon and Aaron pointed to the message that change is possible. They shared that Tier 4 did not begin as the

Fix Tier 6 (continued)

strong system many of us know today. Instead, it was improved over time through advocacy, legislative action, and collective pressure from union members across the state. Hearing that history alongside the New York State Comptroller's remarks about the current strength of the retirement system reinforced an important point. The inequities we see today are not permanent. With sustained collective action, Tier 6 can be improved just as Tier 4 was.

For Shannon, the issue is deeply personal. She explained that choosing a career in public education has always meant accepting a tradeoff, lower salaries in exchange for strong benefits like retirement security. Tier 6, however, has shifted that balance. She now contributes more for the entirety of her career and faces a later retirement age, all while earning less take-home pay than fellow union members doing the same work under earlier tiers. She shared that this creates real financial strain and raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of careers in public service.

Aaron, who is in Tier 4, spoke about the importance of solidarity among PA colleagues. He reflected that union membership is not just about individual benefit, but about ensuring fairness for everyone. He noted that it would be easy to ignore the issue if it does not directly affect you, but that mindset runs counter to the core values of unionism. Supporting Tier 6 reform, he emphasized, is about standing up for fellow union members and ensuring that people doing the same work are treated equitably.

As we wrapped up, I asked what they would say to PA colleagues. Their response was clear. If we care about the future of education and public service, we must advocate for strong and



MVCCPA members Aaron Fried and Shannon Crocker attended the Fix Tier 6 rally in Albany organized by NYSUT.

equitable benefits. Retirement security has long been one of the key reasons people choose and remain in these professions. Without it, we risk losing the next generation of educators and public servants.

NYSUT is calling on the Legislature to take concrete steps to address these inequities. Key proposals include allowing Tier 6 members to retire at age 55 with 30 years of service, reducing employee contribution rates, and ending the requirement that members contribute for their entire careers.

The message is clear. Collective action matters. The retirement system has been improved before, and with continued advocacy, it can be improved again.

To learn more and find ways to take action, visit [FixTier6.org](https://www.fixtier6.org). Now is the time for all of us as PA colleagues and fellow union members to stay informed, get involved, and support efforts to fix Tier 6 for our colleagues and for the future of public service.



PA members attend CNY Labor Council Legislative Breakfast

Members of the MVCC Professional Association (PA) recently attended the annual CNY Labor Council Legislative Breakfast, an important opportunity for union members to engage directly with local, state, and federal representatives.

This year's event featured a panel discussion with several local leaders, including Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente Jr., New York State Assemblyman Brian Miller, New York State Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon, and New York State Senator Joseph Griffo. The keynote address was delivered by U.S. Congressman John Mannion.

The PA was represented by Treasurer Ross Wittenberg; members of the Political Outreach Committee, Chair Brittany Dielemans and Rich Kelly; and PA President Erica Brindisi. Attendees had the opportunity not only to hear from elected officials but also to engage in meaningful one-on-one conversations with them.

During these discussions, PA representatives shared key legislative priorities, particularly as they relate to the ongoing New York State budget process. These conversations provided a valuable opportunity to advocate for issues important to community colleges and our membership, and to strengthen relationships with policymakers.

One of the central questions posed to the panel focused on their stance regarding efforts to "Fix Tier 6." Notably, all panel members expressed support for making changes to Tier 6, reinforcing the growing momentum behind this issue.

Events like the CNY Labor Council Legislative Breakfast highlight the importance of member engagement in the legislative process. By participating in these conversations, PA members help ensure that the voices of our faculty and staff are heard at every level of government.

PA Election nominations due by April 24

The MVCCPA is now accepting nominations for upcoming elections. The positions up for election this year are listed at right with the number of people needed for each position. **Nominations are due by 4 p.m. Friday, April 24, 2026.** Please email Second Vice President Robin Saxe to add your name to the ballot or to nominate another PA member for one of these open positions.

HELPFUL LINKS:

PA By-Laws, which define the roles and requirements for each committee and officer: Please refer to the “Proposed Changes to PA By-laws and Constitution” email sent by MVCCPA President Erica Brindisi on April 7, 2026.

Current committee members and committee term dates: mvccpa.org/committee-chairs-and-members

MVCCPA POSITION	NUMBER NEEDED
Second Vice President	1
Secretary	1
NYSUT Representative Assembly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegate • Alternate 	1 3
Community Outreach Committee	2
Education & Training Committee	1
Grievance Committee	2
Internal Communications Committee	4
Member Engagement Committee	2
Political Outreach Committee	4
New Member Committee	2
Social Justice Committee	2
Research and Records Committee	2
Negotiations Committee	6

Proposed changes to Bylaws, Constitution (continued)

In addition, each committee underwent a detailed review of its duties and responsibilities. Committee chairs were consulted and provided input to ensure that descriptions are accurate, current, and reflective of the important work being done. Where appropriate, updates have been made to better align responsibilities with actual practice.

PA Officers were also consulted to review and confirm that their listed duties are accurate and up to date. The full Executive Board reviewed all revisions to ensure clarity, consistency, and accuracy.

The Executive Board is also proposing the

creation of a new Health and Safety Committee. Many other New York State United Teachers locals have established similar committees, and this proposal is modeled after those efforts. This committee is intended to provide a more focused and proactive approach to addressing workplace health and safety concerns, an area of growing importance to our membership.

We encourage all members to review the materials carefully and attend the meeting to participate in the discussion and vote. Your engagement is essential to ensuring that our Constitution and By-Laws continue to reflect the needs and priorities of our membership.

Social Justice Committee



Walking a mile for the Rescue Mission

On Feb. 14, 2026, members of the Social Justice Committee and the MVCC community took part in the 15th annual Walk-A-Mile In My Shoes event, organized by the Rescue Mission of Utica.

This annual walk raises both funds and awareness for programs that support individuals experiencing homelessness in the Utica area. These programs provide advocacy for vulnerable populations, as well as essential services such as meals and safe lodging — especially critical during Central New York’s harsh winter months.

The event had been postponed by a week due to dangerously cold temperatures, so participants were eager to get out and walk in the brisk, but manageable morning.

Spirits were high as a large group of community

members, local officials, and volunteers gathered to take part in the one-mile walk from City Hall to the Rescue Mission and back. The registration of our MVCC group raised \$180 in support of the Rescue Mission’s ongoing efforts.

Beyond fundraising, the walk through the cold morning offered a visceral reminder of the daily challenges faced by those without stable housing. For many participants, the event was not only a meaningful way to give back, but also a chance to connect with the broader community and better understand the importance of the services the Rescue Mission provides.

In Solidarity,
Mike Kuczynski
Chair, Social Justice Committee

Valuable benefits available to you and your family



**BENEFITS
CORNER**

As Chair of the PA Benefits Trust Fund, I want to take a moment to remind members of some of the valuable benefits available to you and your families.

Our fund is proud to offer vision coverage, life insurance, and legal services — three important resources designed to support you now and in the future. While these benefits may seem straightforward, they can make a meaningful difference when you need them most.

- Vision benefits help cover routine eye care and corrective lenses, supporting your overall health and well-being. This benefit is available to eligible members and their dependents at no charge, but you must enroll. Find more information and the enrollment form: mvccpa.org/davis-vision
- The life insurance benefit provides an added layer of financial protection and peace of mind for your loved ones. Your enrollment for \$50,000 in coverage is automatic after six months in a full-time bargaining unit position, but you should name your beneficiaries right away! Find more information and name your beneficiaries: mvccpa.org/mvccpa-benefits-fund
- Access to legal services can be especially valuable when navigating matters such as wills, real estate, or other personal legal needs. We recently had a Will Day on campus, but many other services are also provided by our law partners.

If you have questions on the benefits described or would like more information, please don't hesitate to email me at cvannamee@mvcc.edu.

In solidarity,
Christine VanNamee
Chair, Benefits Fund



Christine VanNamee
Benefits Fund Chair

2 students win 2026 MVCCPA Scholarships

MVCC students Eindra (Jen) Aung and Matthew Marvel have been named the 2026 recipients of the MVCCPA Scholarship. This annual \$1,000 award recognizes outstanding students currently enrolled at MVCC who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership, and community involvement. The scholarships were presented during the PA Luncheon on Jan. 16, 2026.

Eindra (Jen) Aung, an international student from Burma, has excelled academically while deeply involved on campus. A first-generation college student majoring in Liberal Arts & Sciences: Mathematics & Science, Jen aspires to become a neurosurgeon and help improve healthcare for underserved communities, especially in her home country of Burma. She says she always wanted to be a doctor, but wasn't sure which path to take. While taking Intro to Psychology in her first semester at MVCC, Jen discovered the field of biopsychology and decided to study the human brain. While at MVCC, she has served as President of the Lambda Beta Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges, and has participated in PTK's Intergenerational Clean-Ups and blood drives every semester. She also has volunteered at MVCC's STEM Fest, Utica Zoo Spooktacular, and other events. In the community, she volunteers at The Center's Clothing Closet, assisting refugees and immigrants finding appropriate clothing, and ensures that families receive what they need.

Matthew Marvel, a Fire Protection Technology major from Utica, has excelled in his studies while actively involved on campus and in the community.



Eindra (Jen) Aung



Matthew Marvel

Also a first-generation college student, Matthew knew from a young age that he wanted to help others. A student in MVCC's Educational Opportunity Program, Matthew recently received the Norman R. McConney Jr. Award for Student Excellence, which recognizes outstanding EOP students for academic merit and perseverance. He is a member of the International Club and Phi Theta Kappa. He also works as a lifeguard at the MVCC Pool and gives back to the community as a volunteer member with Frankfort Center Fire, the Utica Karen Baptist Church, and the Midtown Utica Community Center.

The Value of Community College

By Eaindra (Jen) Aung

2026 PA Scholarship winner

Coming from Burma, a country shaped by the world's longest civil war and ongoing turmoil, studying abroad was not a choice, but a necessity for my survival and future. When life at home grew life-threatening and I could no longer imagine a future for myself there, I made the most difficult and heartbreaking decision of my life. Leaving my home, my family, and everything familiar was a weight I carried quietly, an impossible choice I made only because my dreams were bigger than my fear. My parents, who came from a middle-class background, sacrificed everything to send me abroad so I could chase the future they never had the chance to imagine for themselves. Their belief in me became the anchor I held onto when everything else felt uncertain.

Attending a community college was not part of a long-planned path, but simply what I could afford. Ivy Leagues and prestigious universities were dreams far beyond my financial reach. However, what I did not know then was that Mohawk Valley Community College would become one of the greatest and most life-changing places I could have ended up in. When I first arrived at MVCC in August 2024, I was a quiet, introverted student, unsure of myself and burdened with fear of failure and judgment. I had always held myself to impossibly high standards, and self-criticism was my default. Despite earning a 4.0 GPA in my first year, I felt a void, a void that academic achievement alone was not enough to truly grow. I felt somewhat incomplete.

Everything shifted when I joined Phi Theta Kappa. Being inducted and later chosen as a chapter president was a turning point that reshaped the way I saw myself. The girl who

once sat in the back of the classroom is now leading meetings, organizing projects, and speaking in front of a huge crowd. I found my second family in my advisors and fellow officers, who encouraged me, uplifted me, and reminded me that I was capable of more than I ever allowed myself to believe.

Community college gave me something precious I could not have found anywhere else. It gave me a space to grow, introduced me with people who genuinely cared, and provided me with opportunities I never imagined I'd be brave enough to take. I became a peer tutor, connected with incredible instructors, made close friends, and discovered a love for talking to people that I never had before. Small class sizes, like me General Chemistry II class of just seven students, become more like a small family than just classmates. We study together almost every week, helping each other through topics that feel impossible solving alone, and celebrating every small victory. That closeness is something I know I would never have experienced in a big university lecture hall.

MVCC did more than educate me. It transformed me. It took a fearful girl from a war-torn country and helped her become a leader, a mentor, and someone who now stands with confidence and purpose.

In my perspective, the value of an institution is not measured by prestige or size. It is measured by the lives it changed and the people it lifts. MVCC gave me the chance to rewrite my story, to believe in myself, and to build the future of a neurosurgeon I have always dreamed of.

MVCC did more than prepare me for the future. It showed me that I am capable of creating one.

The Importance of Labor Unions

By Matthew Marvel

2026 PA Scholarship winner

Labor unions are one of the most important aspects of American society. Before labor unions, American workers were often exploited through unsafe working conditions, long hours and bad pay. Everyone from teachers to fire fighters were working often 12+ hours a day with no regulated rest time. The places they were working at often had little to no safety rules and were often unhygienic. After decades of working in these tough conditions, workers across the country organized to create America's first labor unions.

The Journeymen Cordwainers were the first labor union in the United States of America formed by shoemakers in Philadelphia in 1794 to fight for better wages and working conditions. This sets the precedent for other labor unions to form across the economy. Regardless of the union, all of them brought reforms such as forty-hour work weeks and paid time off. Labor unions also created a sense of solidarity between workers to make the workplace enjoyable for everyone. By the 1960s and 70s, millions of American workers were benefiting as members of unions. Unfortunately, the number of workers in unions has declined. It only started to pick up again in the last couple of years.

These labor unions have become a core part of the lives of millions of American workers. It has brought stability to teachers, truck drivers, police officers, etc. All of these people know that as members of their own union, they have made a lifelong commitment to being members of their respective organizations. I have multiple

family members who are members of different unions. For example, a cousin that is a Marine is a member of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE). A friend who is a member of United Association of Flight Attendants. My EOP mentor is also a member of THE New York State Teacher Association. All three have communicated the benefits of being members and highly recommend becoming a member.

When I volunteered at the Frankfort Center Fire Department, I got my first opportunity to become a member of a labor union: the Firefighters union. I witnessed first-hand the camaraderie between the firefighters. This only grew my passion to continue being a member of labor unions in my future.

As someone aspiring to become a paramedic, I would be part of AFGE; a labor union representing 800,000+ employees of the federal government such as military personnel. The AFGE is one of the most generous unions across the country offering benefits such as health and legal services, identity theft protection, and savings on travel, electronics, and mortgages. I am excited to carry the tradition of the benefits members of labor unions receive.

Until I reach financial stability as a paramedic, my family and I are low-income and require financial support. This scholarship gives people like me an opportunity to achieve our goals and provide for our families. I appreciate the support and the chance to discuss such an important topic as the impact of labor unions in America.

Kernan Elementary sends Valentine's Day thank-you note to PA members

