

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*



## M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

*The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"*

Number 34 – August 25, 2022



*In this issue//Big Win for Mariners in Staten Island Ferry Fleet//New Agreement for WSF Members//ITF Recovered Millions for Global Mariners//Jones Act Benefits in Puerto Rico//New Pasha Ship Begins Service//*

### **BIG WIN FOR STATEN ISLAND FERRY ENGINEERS AS CONTRACT PUSH HEATS UP**

In a victory for marine engineers sailing in the Staten Island Ferry system that bodes well for the rest of the mariner force, an Administrative Law Judge in New York City has ruled that engine work aboard the vessels is analogous to such jobs in the U.S.-flag Maersk fleet and should be paid comparatively.

Staten Island ferry mariners haven't had a pay raise in almost 12 years after the contract expired in 2010 and underpaid workers in the fleet have sought opportunities elsewhere through the years. The City's inability to attract and retain qualified mariners has created service disruptions that occasionally boils over into frustration for commuters who rely on the ferry service during their daily lives. The M.E.B.A. has pointed out that the City's failure to adequately compensate its Staten Island Ferry mariners "has left our crews with enormous financial hardship and grueling work hours to keep up with today's soaring inflation and cost of living."

The M.E.B.A.'s push to secure fair compensation for the mariners it represents in the ferry system was tested by the City's central, independent administrative law court that adjudicates city matters. Law Judge Faye Lewis from the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) agreed with the Union in a ruling issued this week that states that "marine engineers and chief marine engineers" onboard the Staten Island Ferries "should be paid the rates of prevailing wages and benefits commensurate with those paid to chief engineers and first assistant engineers on U.S.-flag Maersk cargo vessels."

The City is currently reviewing the decision and can choose to appeal.

The ruling was handed down days before the Union goes back to the bargaining table with the City looking to finally nail down a long overdue contract covering mariners who carry out high-stress jobs without adequate support from the City. An impartial mediator will join the parties to assist talks.

M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer Roland "Rex" Rexha, a former Shop Steward at the Ferry system, hailed the ruling, saying that "Judge Lewis's decision is a triumph for our crews and upholds our longtime concerns that SIF engineers and other officers are paid well-below other professional mariners although their work obligations and skills are equal."

Once again, the Union would like to credit the solidarity and dedication of our mariners in the fleet who have stayed strong during their long unresolved contract situation. M.E.B.A. will continue our good faith contract negotiations with the New York City Office of Labor Relations.

### **NEW AGREEMENT FOR WASHINGTON STATE FERRY MEMBERS**

After weeks of hard bargaining, M.E.B.A. negotiators secured new agreements for M.E.B.A. Licensed, Unlicensed and Port Engineers in the Washington State Ferry fleet long ahead of the contracts' commencement date.

The three-year contracts go into effect on July 1, 2023 and run until June 30, 2025. Among other items, the agreements net solid wage increases for our members, maintains the status quo on routes and relieving terminals, and also adds another compensated holiday for the Unlicensed.

The contracts hold firm on language regarding a compensatory time cap, and anti-retaliation stipulations were added. Importantly, the agreements make COVID-19 boosters optional - previously the State had wanted to make it a condition of employment. The contracts reflect that the COVID-19 booster vaccine is voluntary, and those who opt to take the booster will be rewarded with a \$1,000 payment.

Strong rank-and-file participation ensured the success of talks for the Union, with M.E.B.A. WSF Representative Eric Winge leading negotiations with valuable input and oversight contributed by Seattle Branch Agent Jeff Duncan. The rank-and-file Licensed negotiating members included Felix Tapley, Chris Schneider, Forrest Nichols and Scott Maddox. Unlicensed rank-and-file members included Brandon Powell, Ryan McLaughlin, Mark Mraz, Anthony Tarricone and Marshall Warner. Rank-and-file members representing Port Engineers included Wes Sweet, Jim Schubert, Bill Schweyen, Jeff Chia and Jim Blake. Thank you, and congratulations all!

### **ITF RECOVERS MILLIONS IN UNPAID MARINER WAGES**

Last year, International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) ship inspectors managed to recover over \$37 million in wages that had been withheld from seafarers by unscrupulous shipowners.

M.E.B.A. is a member organization of the ITF, a global union federation fighting for the rights, equality and justice of almost 20 million working men and women in the transport sector around the world. Primarily, ITF Inspectors help battle against substandard shipping to help raise up the wages and conditions of mariners worldwide.

The ITF and its team of Inspectors, which includes M.E.B.A.'s Eric White, continue to assist seafarers by making sure they have basic amenities, are properly repatriated at the end of their ship assignments and receive the wages they are owed. In 2021, the ITF's 125 inspectors and coordinators completed 7,265 inspections to support thousands of seafarers with wage claims and repatriation cases, despite COVID-19 restrictions preventing inspectors' ability to board ships for much of the year.

Inspectors are trained to look for exploitation, overwork – even for signs of forced labor and modern slavery. On many vessels, Inspectors have the right to examine wage accounts, employment contracts, and to review recorded hours of work and rest.

Steve Trowsdale, the ITF's Inspectorate Coordinator, said the makeup of seafarers' wage claims was changing. "Concerningly, we're seeing a rise in the number of seafarers reporting non-payment of wages for periods of two months or longer, which actually meets the International Labor Organization's (ILO) definition of abandonment...Seafarers might think it's normal to go unpaid for a couple of months, waiting for a shipowner to sort out financing, but they need to be aware that non-payment can also be a sign that a shipowner is about to cut them loose and leave them abandoned."

The ITF reported 85 cases of abandonment to the ILO last year, an historic high. In many of those cases, abandoned crew had already been waiting on several weeks or months of unpaid wages.

As the crew change crisis worsened in early 2021, a flood of requests filled the ITF's inboxes from crew desperate to sign off and get home. COVID-related border restrictions were the underlying reason for the crew change crisis, which impacted an estimated 400,000 seafarers at the worst point of the crisis. But on some ships, other more sinister factors were at play in keeping crew from their families.

"There is evidence that some shipowners were using COVID-19 as an excuse to keep seafarers working beyond their initial contracts and in complete violation of those seafarers' human and labor rights," said Trowsdale. "Thankfully, our team was wise to what was going on and despite everything we got thousands of seafarers home."

"Keeping crew onboard while pretending their hands were tied may have saved those employers a few dollars in flight fares, but in today's society that kind of conduct gets noticed. There are no shadows to hide in anymore when it comes to global supply chain accountability," he said.

### **JONES ACT DELIVERS BETTER PERFORMANCE, ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR PUERTO RICO, SAYS NEW STUDY**

A new comprehensive Ernst & Young study evaluating the Jones Act's effects in the Caribbean relative to global averages found that the statute heightens carrier performance and provides "substantial" economic benefits to Puerto Rico. The study, commissioned by the Transportation Institute evaluated the Jones Act and its implications on freight rates, container availability, port congestion, and carrier performance in that region during peak COVID years (January 2019 to December 2021). "Across multiple metrics, shippers overwhelmingly associated better carrier performance with Jones Act carriers than non-Jones Act ones," according to the study. It also concluded that "in addition to providing stability and security in the region, the Jones Act shipping industry continues to provide substantial economic benefits to Puerto Rico."

"Jones Act carriers are dedicated to Puerto Rico and help local businesses make goods more affordable and the supply chain more reliable compared to our global competitors," said Transportation Institute President James Henry. "While the entire global supply chain was disrupted during the pandemic, our Jones Act carriers proved to be 27 times more affordable and 8 times more reliable than non-Jones Act carriers."

An Executive Summary of the study is available at <https://tinyurl.com/eytipr>

## **NEW PASHA SHIP BEGINS SERVICE**

The newbuild Pasha Hawaii vessel MV GEORGE III began service recently ahead of its September 1 christening in Los Angeles. Pasha recently took delivery of the 774-foot LNG-fueled containership that was constructed at Brownsville, Texas-based Keppel AmFels. It is the first of two Ohana-class containerships (JANET MARIE will be the second) that will serve the Hawaii - Mainland trade lane. The Ohana Class vessels are named in honor of George Pasha, III and Janet Marie, the late parents of The Pasha Group President and CEO George Pasha, IV, marking three generations of service to Hawaii. The Jones Act vessels have a capacity of 2,525 TEUs, with a sailing speed of 23.0 knots.

The GEORGE III made her inaugural visit to Long Beach, CA last week then soon after sailed to Honolulu, her home port. Pasha Hawaii President and CEO George Pasha IV said, “Through my father’s leadership, what started out as a personal vehicle storage company, evolved into a world-class global logistics and transportation company. As we mark our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and welcome GEORGE III to Long Beach, we are proud to continue my family’s legacy of innovation and environmental stewardship, while recognizing our employees as our extended ‘ohana.’”

“This is another positive step toward the widespread adoption of alternative fuels in cargo shipping and using cleaner technology to do business at the Port,” said Harbor Commission President Sharon Weissman. “Pasha Hawaii shares our long-term commitment for growing sustainably and responsibly.”

## **NEXT MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS** *(All times are local)*

**Monday, September 5** – Halls Closed – *Labor Day*

**Tuesday, September 6** – **Boston@1200; CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

**Wednesday, September 7** – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing mebahq@mebaunion.org**

**Thursday, September 8** – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

**Friday, September 9** – **Honolulu@1100.**

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*M.E.B.A. does not tolerate assault, or harassment of any kind.  
If you see something, say something – The M.E.B.A. Emergency Hotline  
can be reached at 1-888-519-0018.*

*The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and demonstrated track record of readiness, safety, and loyalty in answering America's call to action in times of both peace and war is unrivaled in the world. M.E.B.A. HQ – Phone: (202) 638-5355; [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org). For publication and related inquiries (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org) Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.*