

We're Forming a Union!



What is a union?

A union is a non-profit organization run completely by and for its members, and funded solely from member dues. The purpose of a union is to improve wages, benefits, workplace policies, training opportunities and protection in the case of lay-offs or discipline. A union gives employees a legal framework to act as one united group.

Will a union benefit me?

Right now, pay, benefits, hours, workplace policies, and advancement are decided only by management. A union can balance that lopsided structure. A union can give workers a greater voice and can work with management to improve our workplace for ourselves and our clients. Union staff can help us negotiate for better wages, benefits, policies, training and job protection. A union would represent all staff (attorneys, legal assistants, screeners and others).

Who else does OPEIU represent?

OPEIU Local 8 represents over 6,500 workers, mostly at non-profit organizations in Washington, including Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), Unemployment Law Project (ULP), Solid Ground, Compass Housing Alliance, Plymouth Housing Group, Senior Life Resources, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Tri-Cities Community Health Center, and many more.

Can I get in trouble?

No. It is illegal for our employer to fire, demote, discipline or in any way interfere with our right to form a union. The National Labor Relations Act is the federal labor law that protects employees' rights to form a union, as well as **RCW 49.32.020**.

How might management respond?

Our goal is to foster a cooperative, respectful relationship with management. We hope our employer will honor our right to form a union and remain neutral in this process rather than engaging in behaviors that could mislead or pressure us. In recent past, many employers have tried very hard to persuade employees that forming a union is a bad idea. This has included "education" efforts including mandatory meetings, letters, one-on-one talks and other tactics designed to intimidate and weaken employees' resolve to unite as one strong group.

What about dues? I can't afford to lose any of my pay!

No one pays dues until **after** we negotiate and vote to approve a new contract which will have improvements, possibly to wages, benefits, or both. We wouldn't approve a contract that didn't make improvements; that's the whole point of forming a union! After that, OPEIU Local 8 dues are on a sliding scale based on 1.5% of our gross monthly income. (A quick way to calculate this is to figure \$7.50 for every \$500). New employees hired **after** we vote to approve a new contract would pay a one-time initiation fee, 50% would be refunded after attending one meeting.

Can we talk about the union at work?

If we're allowed to talk about other non-work topics at work, then we can talk about our union. Union activity is protected under the National Labor Relations Act and **RCW 49.32.020, which protects workers' rights to self-organize and designate representatives to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment, "free from interference, restraint, or coercion of employers."** However, it's best to limit the time we talk about union activities to non-work time like breaks, lunch, and before or after work. We also have the legal right to distribute union information so long as we do it during a break or other non-work time and in non-work areas.

Can we be forced to go on strike?

No. A strike is very rare. OPEIU settles 99% of its contracts without ever going on strike. There could only be a strike at Northwest Justice Project if the vast majority of employees voted to do so, and there are several preliminary steps before such a vote. Union officers or staff can't "call a strike," nor can OPEIU members at other workplaces. Only union members at NJP could make that decision. In almost all cases, there are many more-effective alternatives to striking.

Is now really the time?

Today's political climate means insecure times in our work. However, with a union we will have a seat at the table if difficult decisions need to be made.

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Our Next Steps...

- ➊ Expand our **Organizing Committee** of co-workers willing to help build a union and be a resource to their co-workers.
- ➋ **Show Support** for forming a union by adding your signature to the petition.
- ➌ Have our **Union legally recognized** through either voluntary recognition by our employer or a secret ballot election run by the National Labor Relations Board.
- ➍ **Negotiate a New Employment Contract.** If over 50% of non-management employees vote to join the union, our employer will be required to negotiate with us over a new contract.

The union will elect a representative **Bargaining Team**, survey all employees, identify issues we want to address and meet with management to bargain our new contract. Experienced OPEIU staff will help us every step of the way.

- ➎ **Vote to approve a New Employment Contract.**

***For more information, ask a Union Organizing Committee Member,
or contact Local 8 Organizer Corinne by phone or text
425-318-2650 or email corinne@opeiu8.org.***

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