

# MFPE Advocate

mfpe.org

Spring 2022

I love being president of this union. I am impressed and inspired every day by our thousands of members across Montana who show up to work every day and fight for their colleagues. There is no other group of people like us looking out for the safety, rights, and economic dignity of their fellow humans.

The best part of this job is traveling to meet members in their communities and workspaces. I recently spent two days in the Montana State Prison meeting members who put their lives at risk every day to make sure our communities are safe and felons get a chance to pay their debt and return to society. I met with Warm Springs leaders who are working in unbelievably harsh conditions and are concerned for their patients' rights and safety as much as their own. I met Highway Patrol troopers who are looking to each other and their union to win back their deserved respect as the protectors of Montana's expansive interstate and highway system. I visited schools from Broadus to Missoula and witnessed firsthand countless examples of teachers, paras, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and secretaries who keep schools open and safe for every Montana kid in every Montana community, offering individualized, innovative, and flexible lesson plans and classroom settings.

I hear the same things almost everywhere I go. The cost of living is rising faster than pay. Housing is either unavailable or unaffordable. Students, parents, trustees, administrators, and colleagues are somehow different post-covid. Some employers aren't talking with union members before imposing new working conditions. Montanans, employers and employees alike, are stressed out and angry and emotions boil over at work and at home. Believe it or not, I get the occasional membership drop request from a member who thinks that leaving the union is the solution to at least one of these issues. Maybe they're frustrated

with a local issue or with local officers, or maybe they're just trying to save a buck.

You, every single one of you, ARE this union. A union doesn't exist without members. Instead of looking to get benefits of membership without paying for them, we all need to look

to each other for increased power through increased membership. Dispatchers, facility workers, and school district employees from Valier to Missoula have recently won significant pay increases through the bargaining process. None of this is possible without a BIG, strong union with active, engaged members. Your employer knows if your local is at 50% or 100% membership and behaves accordingly. Membership is our power!

And let's not forget that ALL of us benefit when MFPE members step forward to lead. MFPE has 25 members running for the 2023 legislature, a remarkable number of committed, dedicated individuals from BOTH political parties who will positively influence our entire state if elected. Montana will be well served by every one of them who successfully wins election.

Local member teams will soon interview and endorse (or not) these and other candidates in every single legislative district in Montana. Just one more way our members are stepping forward and making a difference. Each of us has a collective obligation to make this union as big and strong as possible. Every spring, MFPE members congregate to decide the business of our union for the next year. It's a special event not to be missed. On April 8th and 9th in Helena, hundreds of MFPE members will amend our Constitution, elect officers and delegates to our national conferences, and adopt a legislative program, dues, and budget. Every local gets a voice and a vote, and MFPE pays for lodging and provides meals. I look forward to seeing and meeting many of you at the conference and at MFPE Spring Meetings around the state. You are MFPE!



**AMANDA CURTIS**  
MFPE PRESIDENT

SAVE THE DATE!  
5th ANNUAL MFPE CONFERENCE  
APRIL 8-9, 2022 ★ HELENA

## Hundreds of MFPE members from across the state will convene April 8-9, 2022 in Helena for the 5th MFPE Annual Conference, our union's most important event of the year.

At the third MFPE Annual Conference, Delegates will:

- ▶ Elect statewide officers.
- ▶ Vote on dues, budget, new business items, and amendments to the MFPE constitution.
- ▶ Get important updates on state and national issues that affect us as union members and public employees.

In addition, the conference will hold elections for statewide office. The following candidates have declared their candidacies for election to statewide office as of the March 1 deadline for nominations in accordance with conference standing rules:

- ▶ President (2-year term beginning June 15, 2022). Declared candidate: **Amanda Curtis**, MFPE President
- ▶ 1st Vice President (2-year term beginning June 15, 2022). Declared candidate: **Eric Matthews**, MFPE 1st Vice President
- ▶ 2nd Vice President (2-year term beginning June 15, 2022). Declared candidate: **Samantha Harrington**, MFPE District 5 Chair
- ▶ Treasurer (2-year term beginning June 15, 2022). Declared candidate: **Michelle Wheat**, MFPE Treasurer
- ▶ NEA Director (Filling remainder of term ending August 31, 2024). Declared candidates: **KaCee Ballou**, Missoula Education Association president; **Kim Stout**, Helena Education Association board member

MFPE's nominations and elections committee are actively soliciting nominations for the following MFPE elected positions and all active members are eligible to run for these

positions. Elections will be held at the 5th MFPE Annual Conference.

- ▶ MFPE District Chairs and Vice Chairs
- ▶ Even numbered districts (2-year term beginning June 15, 2022)
- ▶ District 1, Vice Chair (filling remainder of term ending June 14, 2023)
- ▶ MFPE Delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly
- ▶ One delegate from each MFPE District (1-year term)

Eligible members interested in running for any of the positions listed above should e-mail Donna Graveley at [dgraveley@mfpe.org](mailto:dgraveley@mfpe.org). Nominees must include the office they seek, name, mailing address, cell phone, e-mail address, place of employment, and local affiliate.

If you have questions regarding the nominations and elections process, contact Donna at [dgraveley@mfpe.org](mailto:dgraveley@mfpe.org) or call 1-800-398-0826 or 442-4250.

If you're interested in attending the 5th MFPE Annual Conference as a delegate, please talk to your local president. Every local MFPE affiliate is entitled to send at least one delegate. Delegates are selected at the local level. Don't let your local go unrepresented!

The conference will be held at the Delta Hotels Helena Colonial located at 2301 Colonial Drive in Helena (406-443-2100).





## Dispatcher Success

MFPE members have all felt the pinch of inadequate staffing in our workplaces these past two years. Like many others, Helena dispatchers have seen their workloads increase alongside a surge in employee burn-out. It's no mystery why: more work for fewer people, which not only impacts our members but the safety of their communities. Undeterred, MFPE member dispatchers in Helena have taken matters into their own hands and the results have been significant.

Joining together through their local union, city dispatchers worked with MFPE Field Consultant Megan Casey to bring concerns and solutions to the city manager in early February. Members believed that if something was going to be done about retention and recruitment, wages had to be addressed. After discussions, the City Manager agreed and the result was a significant increase in wages for current dedicated employees by the end of the month. This was an essential step towards addressing the call center's staffing crisis.

As a result of MFPE members uniting to address a serious worker shortage, the City of Helena will now be able to advertise dispatcher jobs with a level of compensation sure to attract more employees and retain current dispatchers, who will always answer the call and ensure the right people get to you in any emergency.

To get more involved in your local union, contact your local union president. You can also find your region's MFPE Field Consultant by visiting [mfpe.org/field-services](http://mfpe.org/field-services).

## NO on CI-121

**M**FPE members beware: someone might ask you to sign a petition to put Constitutional Initiative 121 (CI-121) on the ballot. Please think before you ink! CI-121 is a reckless proposal that would punish Montana communities, schools, seniors, young families, and small businesses while changing our Montana Constitution in a way that will harm Montanans for generations.

CI-121 seeks to impose a series of constitutional limitations on how Montana assesses and taxes residential property. While it may sound like a good thing, CI-121 would change property taxes in a way that would do much more harm than good. It's time for leaders in Montana to address our taxes, but altering the state constitution is not the way to do it. Once tax policy is put in the constitution, it's nearly impossible to remove it, even if it hurts Montanans and our communities. And that's exactly what CI-121 would do.

Here's why you should decline to sign the CI-121 petition:

If CI-121 gets on the ballot and becomes part of our state's constitution, it will starve Montana's public services, including public education, public safety, and state and local infrastructure of essential resources. This will have devastating impacts on MFPE members and your families all over Montana. We need to be investing more in our communities and the essential public services our members provide, not less. But this constitutional initiative would handcuff our communities and elected officials. The people pushing CI-121 openly admit that their initiative is modeled after California's Proposition 13, which gutted public services and education in California for decades. Montana needs

Montana solutions, not California failures.

CI-121 would also penalize new homeowners, young families, and seniors. Under CI-121, neighbors with identical properties will pay radically different taxes even though they receive the same local and state services. Additionally, young families looking to purchase their first home and seniors looking to downsize in retirement will all have to pay more.



Finally, CI-121 doesn't even accomplish what it sets out to do. While purporting to be a measure to limit tax increases, the benefits of CI-121 tax relief will disproportionately go to wealthy, out-of-state property owners, while INCREASING taxes for thousands of Montanans. Worse, this irresponsible measure will shift taxes onto the backs of Montana farmers, ranchers, and small

businesses. Our neighbors, friends, and families shouldn't have to pay the price while wealthy out of staters profit off of their new tax breaks.

MFPE is not alone in opposing CI-121. We are joined by a broad, bipartisan, and diverse coalition of opponents including organizations and individuals representing Montana small business, farmers, ranchers, local government, schools, construction, public and private sector workers, and many more. While these groups don't always agree, they all understand the potential danger of this initiative and its impact on Montana.

MFPE members do work that matters. However, the work we do and the communities we serve will be harmed irreparably if CI-121 gets on the ballot and becomes part of our Montana Constitution. Please DON'T sign CI-121!

If you have questions regarding CI-121, please email MFPE Political Director Lauren Caldwell at [lcaldwell@mfpe.org](mailto:lcaldwell@mfpe.org)





MONTANA FEDERATION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES



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# MFPE Spring Meetings are coming your way!

As always, MFPE Spring Meetings will preview the issues and actions that will occur at MFPE’s Annual Conference in April, including state officer elections, approval of MFPE’s legislative program, budget, dues, and more.

MFPE Spring Meetings also provide a great opportunity to ask questions, meet union members in your area, and learn about the work of your statewide union! All members are encouraged to attend the meeting closest to you.

## MILES CITY

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

6:00 p.m.- 7:00 p.m.

Miles City Town & Country Club  
S 4TH St. & Eagle Ave, Miles City, MT 59301

## WOLF POINT

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Sherman Inn  
200 E Main St, Wolf Point, MT 59201

## BILLINGS

Thursday, March 10, 2022

6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Billings Education Association Office  
510 N 29th St, Billings, MT 59101

## STATEWIDE VIRTUAL MEETING

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

To register, visit [mfpe.org/event](https://mfpe.org/event)

## HAVRE

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Char’s Diner  
624 1st St, Havre, MT 59501

