



PARTNERSHIP ON AI

SHARED PROSPERITY INITIATIVE

How the Pennsylvania government and a major union agreed to AI protections for state employees

A case study of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and SEIU Local 668

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Commonwealth
of Pennsylvania



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Executive Summary

In March 2025, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro published a letter outlining commitments regarding AI. These included [eight AI protections and provisions](#) for state employees, most of whom serve in positions represented by unions. Simultaneously, the Governor's Office of Administration negotiated a binding "side letter" agreement with SEIU Local 668, which represents nearly 10,000 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania employees, that formally established a "Generative AI Labor and Management Collaboration Group" involving both the commonwealth and the union, as well as further key AI protections for workers. PAI interviewed Commonwealth of Pennsylvania leadership including Tracy Sullivan (director of the Employee Relations and Workforce Support Office), Harrison MacRae (director of Emerging Technologies), and Daniel Egan (communications director at the Pennsylvania Office of Administration), as well as Steve Catanese (president of SEIU Local 668), in order to better understand the process of creating durable AI labor agreements from both union and employer perspectives.

While each side put forth distinct perspectives on how the agreement was shaped, we found a number of **Shared Key Insights** across the interviews:

KEY INSIGHT 1 Read analysis	Build on established labor-management trust to make AI negotiations more productive – and use AI negotiations to deepen that trust.
KEY INSIGHT 2 Read analysis	Involve workers as experts to produce AI policies that improve outcomes for both employees and the organization.
KEY INSIGHT 3 Read analysis	Defining AI as a tool, not a replacement, establishes a foundation for addressing risks of worker displacement while enabling organizational innovation.
KEY INSIGHT 4 Read analysis	Ongoing labor-management collaboration helps AI governance adapt as technology evolves.

We also uncovered **Additional Insights** based on the unique perspectives of leaders from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and SEIU Local 668:

KEY INSIGHT 5 Read analysis	Include workers from the start to make AI-supported services accessible and efficient. <i>(From Commonwealth of Pennsylvania leaders)</i>
KEY INSIGHT 6 Read analysis	Engage proactively when AI is introduced, even if unions have not been invited to the table. <i>(From SEIU Local 668)</i>
KEY INSIGHT 7 Read analysis	Seek broad, high-level agreements to protect a wider range of workers, and use "patterning" or "impact bargaining" to extend protections across unions. <i>(From SEIU Local 668)</i>

Introduction

In this pair of case studies, we interviewed stakeholders to gain insights into the process of creating a generative AI labor agreement from both union and employer perspectives. This unique opportunity provided us with a 360-degree view of how workers and employers might negotiate over AI implementation in the workplace while collaboratively developing strong worker protections. This study focuses on:

- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which has roughly [74,000 employees](#) and is currently led by Governor Josh Shapiro, a Democrat. We spoke with Tracy Sullivan (director of the Employee Relations and Workforce Support Office), Harrison MacRae (director of Emerging Technologies), and Daniel Egan (communications director at the Pennsylvania Office of Administration).
- SEIU Local 668, which represents 10,000 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania employees, predominantly in social services. We spoke with Steve Catanese, SEIU Local 668's president.

Pennsylvania's AI Investments and Labor Context

A State in Transition

Pennsylvania is a rust belt state that has [shifted to technology](#) since the decline of its unionized [steel](#) and [coal mining](#) industries. Governor Shapiro's ascent to office in 2023 coincided with an AI boom that has been particularly vigorous in Pennsylvania. The commonwealth has been working hard to establish itself as an AI and data center hub under his leadership. Shapiro's [Executive Order 2023-19](#) created a Generative AI Governing Board, which oversees the commonwealth's AI policy, use, and deployment. In collaboration with OpenAI and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), Pennsylvania launched a [year-long ChatGPT pilot program](#) with 175 employees across 14 agencies in 2024. Initiated by the commonwealth, the pilot asked employees to experiment with ChatGPT by incorporating it into such work tasks as brainstorming, research, writing, and proofreading.

Apart from its AI partnerships with companies like OpenAI and such research universities as CMU and the University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania is also a major site for planned data centers: More than two dozen are [currently proposed](#). Massive amounts of infrastructural investment in AI include the [revival of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant](#) in a \$16 billion deal with Microsoft and Constellation Energy to help power the energy needs of nearby AI data

centers. At the inaugural Pennsylvania Energy and Innovation Summit in 2025, [Senator Dave McCormick](#) announced \$90 billion of investments in data centers, energy and power infrastructure, and workforce and AI training projects.

Labor Context

Pennsylvania's investments in AI and efforts to integrate AI into government workflows must be viewed in the context of unionization among commonwealth employees. While only [10 percent of US workers](#) belong to a union, [78 percent](#) of commonwealth workers hold positions represented by unions.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania workers also have over twice the average union density for US public sector workers – 32 percent, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. As many industries declined in the 21st century, nonindustrial workers such as teachers and public sector workers have increasingly pursued unionization. Today, major unions include [SEIU Local 668](#), [AFSCME Council 13](#), and [PSEA](#) (Pennsylvania State Education Association). SEIU Local 668 represents nearly 20,000 public, social, and human services workers. Steve Catanese, whom we interviewed for this case study, was elected as president of the local in 2018, and his current term is set to run through December 2026.

Union members enjoy certain legal protections under federal law. If a majority of employees in a workplace support a union, employing entities have a duty to bargain with that union in “good faith.” The US practices “[worksite-level](#)” bargaining – whereby workforces at individual companies and workplaces choose whether to unionize and then negotiate agreements with employers – as opposed to the sectoral bargaining that prevails in much of Europe. The bargaining rights of Pennsylvania's public employees (state, county, and local) are also covered by commonwealth law, such as [Act 195](#) (Public Employee Relations Act or PERA).

SEIU has nationally addressed AI, citing indicators that point to the likelihood that [white collar jobs](#) will be impacted negatively by generative AI. In 2025, April Verrett, SEIU's national president, [vowed](#) that the union would pursue “sector-wide bargaining to establish minimum standards; a prohibition on AI discipline; worker rights to override automated systems; full transparency in data collection; and meaningful retraining when technology transforms jobs.”¹

SEIU Local 668's agreement with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also came amid prominent cuts in the US federal workforce cuts as a Trump administration initiative called the Department of Government Efficiency pushed for headcount reductions while [inserting AI](#) into government processes. From January 2025 to May 2025, [260,000 federal workers](#) were fired, took buyouts, or retired early. Federal worker unions such as the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) [filed lawsuits](#) and other measures in attempts to stop the layoffs.

¹ Catanese mentioned that additional SEIU locals have been negotiating around AI, citing success by [SEIU Local 925](#) in Washington state in negotiating a seat for its president, Tricia Schroeder, on Washington State University's AI governing board. The California State University white-collar Employee's Union (CSUEU) will commence negotiations regarding AI this year, and [SEIU Local 73](#) in Illinois and Indiana obtained language recognizing AI's emergence in a 2023 contract.

The Governor’s Letter and the Side Letter

In March 2025, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania announced findings from the Generative AI Pilot Program that it had run in partnership with OpenAI and CMU. In addition to the [findings](#), the governor released a Letter outlining commitments that include the following [eight AI protections and provisions](#) for commonwealth employees, most of whom hold union-represented positions:

1. AI as a “means to enhance employee productivity and job satisfaction ... not with the agenda of substituting Commonwealth employees with AI.”
2. Inclusion of “union-covered employees in future pilot programs and initiatives to obtain diverse insights. ... The Commonwealth’s goals of understanding how to best facilitate a human-in-the-loop approach to generative AI benefit from the ideas and experiences of employees.”
3. “[S]hould generative AI initiatives reduce the time it takes to complete certain tasks ... the Commonwealth is committed to finding ways for employees to invest any time saved in other ways that improve customer service, customer outcomes, and Commonwealth operations as a whole.”
4. “[T]raining opportunities for employees through the Office of Administration ... to advance employees’ understanding of generative AI.”
5. “[T]echnology-based tools that enable [employees] to work efficiently.”
6. “[G]enerative AI will not be used to replace human supervision. The Commonwealth will always prioritize having humans in the loop of supervisory work.”
7. “[G]enerative AI tools are never personified as ‘AI workers’ or ‘AI employees’ in internal and external-facing policies and communications because a tool or AI agent can never replace the humanity of the public servant that wields it.”
8. “The Commonwealth will solicit input and feedback from employees, including those covered by a union, through a newly established ‘Generative AI Labor and Management Collaboration Group.’”

Simultaneously, the Governor’s Office of Administration negotiated an agreement – a so-called “side letter” (see [Annex](#)) – with SEIU Local 668 that formally established a Generative AI Labor and Management Collaboration Group, including both parties. It also established protections such as a requirement that generative AI would not be used to make disciplinary decisions. Unlike Shapiro’s administrative policy outlines, the terms of this “side letter” agreement are set to endure under future administrations.

Below, we describe some key themes from PAI’s interviews with SEIU Local 668 and commonwealth leaders. Both sides described the process of creating the generative AI agreement as fruitful and said they hope to continue the dialogue as AI technology and its applications continue to evolve.

Shared Key Insights

KEY INSIGHT 1

Build on established labor-management trust to make AI negotiations more productive — and use AI negotiations to deepen that trust.

Representatives from the commonwealth said their preexisting relationship with SEIU Local 668 invited productive exchanges about the implications of integrating AI into the workplace. While the conversations were sometimes challenging, a foundation of trust enabled frank discussions. As Sullivan said, “It comes down to having that relationship and being able to talk through these things with union leadership and have conversations. And sometimes they’re happy conversations, and sometimes they’re hard conversations, but having that baseline relationship with them makes really all the difference.”

SEIU’s Catanese emphasized that the union’s positive relationship with the commonwealth made it all easier: “I’m very appreciative of the folks in the governor’s office because they entered this as a process where they wanted authentic reactions. ... There are material things that we want, and that gives the workers buy-in to feel like they’re not just automatically losing their job in the process.” Even when disagreements surfaced, he said, commonwealth leaders displayed “sympathy and empathy for where we both want to land [as well as] “reticence not to put themselves behind the eight ball as an employer.”

Preexisting trust made it possible for Pennsylvania to genuinely engage with workers’ expertise, which produced a stronger agreement. As Egan put it, “This didn’t happen in a vacuum, right? There was a preexisting relationship that preceded AI.... Having these conversations is kind of helping to build that trust.” Notwithstanding strong feelings about certain issues, both sides felt that they were able to get everything they regarded as essential into the agreement.

Preexisting trust made it possible for Pennsylvania to genuinely engage with workers’ expertise.

KEY INSIGHT 2

Involve workers as experts to produce AI policies that improve outcomes for both employees and the organization.

Commonwealth leadership was interested in understanding what it would mean practically for staff to use AI tools. In launching the 2024 pilot program, they went out of their way to include a range of employees – technical and non-technical, junior and senior. Workers involved in the pilot, some of whom were AFSCME Council 13 members, included both power users and employees who had never used AI as a tool.

Still, the Commonwealth did not initially consult with SEIU Local 668, and no SEIU Local 668 members participated in the pilot's first iteration. Upon learning of the pilot, SEIU Local 668 leadership reached out to begin discussing what potential AI protections might look like. Commonwealth leadership was receptive: "Getting feedback from our union-represented employees is obviously very important," said Sullivan. "Nobody... understands the work better than they do. So being able to partner with SEIU Local 668 in this case was very important."

Commonwealth leadership appreciated the importance of human workers' ability to shape and adapt AI tools to make them more useful: "While there definitely were corrections that were related to factual inaccuracies or hallucinations or bias, by far the most common type of feedback we got was [that] staff needed to provide their own expertise and experience and nuance to make the outputs useful," MacRae said. "Ultimately, we want our staff and humans involved in any of these systems so that they can be the ones, again, to leverage their expertise in this work."

Rather than unilaterally rolling out AI tools, management wanted to hear how the technology fit into workflows. In implementing AI tools, Sullivan recalled saying, "We're going to roll out a tool to give you. We want you to try it out and give us some feedback about what you think works and what you think doesn't work."

SEIU Local 668 was concerned that dialogue about AI needed to involve strong worker representation, not just the views of experts the commonwealth hired. According to Catanese, the state launched an AI ethics panel "and brought in some solid ethicists from Penn State University, but there wasn't an actual, literal worker's seat at the table." Both sides presently concur that encouraging worker input wasn't merely a concession to labor but was essential to making AI tools work in practice.

Commonwealth leadership appreciated the importance of human workers' ability to shape and adapt AI tools to make them more useful.

KEY INSIGHT 3

Defining AI as a tool, not a replacement, establishes a foundation for addressing risks of worker displacement while enabling organizational innovation.

Workers wanted reassurance that AI tools were not seen from above as a means to replace them. “That was the primary concern that Steve [Catanese] was expressing to me that he was hearing from his members,” recalled Sullivan. “They’re worried — especially his income maintenance caseworkers — that AI is eventually just going to come in and be able to do the full scope of their duties.” For his part, Catanese emphasized that the union neither favors nor opposes AI; it cares about how AI is used and what it does: “Where AI is a tool that enhances workers and their jobs ... we’re good with AI. Where it’s a way to reduce workers and eliminate them and make jobs worse and bad for people, we’re opposed.”

A big negotiation issue for SEIU Local 668 was to ensure that public servants are defined as human beings, potentially making it harder for AI to eliminate their positions: “Isn’t there something powerful in a political leader being able to come out and say public servants are human beings, and there’s a humanity in that work? I’ll be here to make sure workers and public servants always have a place in society,” said Catanese.

Most of the agreement entailed affirming preexisting protections regarding discrimination and other issues. While SEIU Local 668 wanted to include some focus on investigating specific AI models the commonwealth was using, the agreement instead pointed to existing labor law and said: “The parties will operate from the premise that generative AI tools and associated systems will be utilized as a tool to assist public employees in supporting the public.”

According to Catanese, the governor’s office viewed the deal with OpenAI as a sign of a new, exciting technology and had not contemplated long-term labor implications. Among workers, there was anxiety about AI being used to replace them. Catanese said many unknowns persist as to how the technology will affect staffing, so the union’s approach to AI was more defensive: “You need to protect your workers as best you can from job loss.” While the commonwealth wanted to focus the working group discussions on where AI would be useful, the union was adamant about also discussing tasks that would be made worse by AI.²

Among workers, there was anxiety about AI being used to replace them.

² For a discussion regarding how AI may create additional labor for workers, see this article: [Instead of improving productivity, AI is creating ‘workshop’](#)

KEY INSIGHT 4

Ongoing labor-management collaboration helps AI governance adapt as technology evolves.

Discussions around definitions and provisions made it clear that even with defined roles for humans and AI, the swift pace of technological change requires ongoing collaboration.

Both sides wanted to ensure that the agreement would be sufficiently open-ended to leave space for future conversations and adjustments. Said Catanese: “It’s really hard to commit to what does human-in-the-loop mean versus this is what it’s going to look like two, three, four, five years down the road. ... We’re going to have to keep having these conversations and keeping those lines of communication open.”

Commonwealth leaders considered it important to keep some definitions open as AI technology changes: “We don’t also want to put something so defined that – based on how the technology changes – then the whole side letter is also out of date to how the technology has moved,” said MacRae. “AI has been a little bit of a moving target.”

SEIU Local 668 proposed a labor-management collaboration group as part of the side letter agreement. The commonwealth agreed to create a specific and separate avenue for conversations about AI concerns, unrelated to other labor-related discussions that occur regularly. The group has no termination date. It is “not a broad labor-management meeting,” explained Sullivan. “We’re going to be focused on AI.”

Given the ongoing nature of the Labor-Management Collaboration Group and the technologies in question, the commonwealth plans to include workers who may not be immediately impacted by AI: “We would intend to, as conversations progress, expand the group to other individuals, other SEIU Local 668 members that do very different jobs that you may not even think could use AI – social workers in a correctional facility, for example,” said Sullivan. Following an initial session that covered AI in general, the group gathered four times by the close of the first quarter of 2026.

As MacRae noted, “AI is a very technical topic, which lives and operates in the technical spaces of organizations. But the success is based on how organizations engage with their employees. ... And so, everything we proactively do to engage with our teams sets everyone up for success.”

Both sides wanted to ensure that the agreement would be sufficiently open-ended to leave space for future conversations and adjustments.

Additional Key Insights

From the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

KEY INSIGHT 5

Include workers from the start to make AI-supported services accessible and efficient.

In addition to the pilot study, the commonwealth engaged with experts to discuss public sector approaches on “enabling AI responsibly” at the local, state, and federal levels. In the public sector, AI tools [might be used](#) to help fill in during budgetary gaps or staffing shortages. For example, in November 2025, the state of Maryland [announced](#) a partnership with Anthropic and Percepta to “accelerate benefits delivery and streamline housing permitting.”

But as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania leadership described in our interview with them, ensuring that AI is integrated into existing systems in a responsible and effective manner means enlisting the perspectives and feedback of workers with expertise in those areas. Some employees, for instance, have reported saving significant time by enlisting AI tools to help them with what MacRae dubbed “[bureaucracy hacking](#)”: taking documents from one place and repackaging them for other teams and needs; writing reports on different areas; or helping with creativity and innovation in places with strict bureaucratic structures.

The commonwealth wanted to grasp how to provide staff with the resources and support to use the tools effectively and to securely meet goals at different agencies: “[We had a lot of really rich research from this pilot on how we could do that. And we are looking ahead to how we can continue to enable access to tools that folks can use securely, having the correct resources,](#)” said MacRae. The commonwealth solicited feedback on user experience from employees via a variety of channels, including the results of feedback surveys from 599 workers, weekly focus groups, and user interviews.

The commonwealth wanted to grasp how to provide staff with the resources and support to use the tools effectively.

From SEIU Local 668

KEY INSIGHT 6

Engage proactively when AI is introduced, even if unions have not been invited to the table.

“Governor Shapiro had just been elected and announced that he was going to make Pennsylvania the first state to really experiment with generative AI, and they were entering a partnership with OpenAI on some pilots. So my alarm bells went up,” recalled Catanese, who saw an opportunity to take action in pursuit of agency for workers: “There’s a big sense of pride that we took a risk here and got into something.” Catanese described an initial “mixture of paralysis, or not being sure where to start. ... I had a lot of anxiety that whatever we got done would be looked at across labor as either a sellout thing, or we did something bad, or we set a bad precedent.”

Governor Shapiro’s AI pilot created an opening for the union to take a more active role in shaping how public sector workers would relate to AI in the workplace. After seeing the pilot launch without 668’s involvement, SEIU Local 668 reached out to the commonwealth to negotiate a side letter agreement.

The union was warier than the commonwealth. Already skeptical about generative AI’s capabilities, Catanese was concerned about how Pennsylvania was allocating public resources for technology. He wondered how AI would be integrated in the workplace, given the technological constraints that often characterize the public sector.

Among SEIU Local 668’s members, some workers were worried, some were disinterested, and some thought AI might help them in their jobs: “And while some didn’t view replacement as an immediate concern, they wanted to ensure that generative AI wouldn’t make their jobs worse or more difficult,” said Catanese.

Governor Shapiro’s AI pilot created an opening for the union to take a more active role.

KEY INSIGHT 7

Seek broad, high-level agreements to protect a wider range of workers, and use “patterning” or “impact bargaining” to extend protections across workers and unions.

Catanese noted that the agreement negotiated by SEIU Local 668 could also be used by others to create additional agreements, in accordance with a concept known as “[pattern bargaining](#).” While each union agreement has many distinct features, patterning the core, fundamental parts can make for a more harmonious labor climate. For example, one union might obtain parental leave, and others then follow suit. Since most jobs are going to be affected by generative AI, the terms of this particular agreement could serve as a model. “We wanted to have something that ideally should just cover every worker, right? Regardless of job class, regardless of function,” explained Catanese.

The agreement negotiated by SEIU Local 668 could also be used by others to create additional agreements.

Indeed, SEIU Local 668 tried to model its approach toward generative AI after prior efforts by unions in the private sector. These included negotiating histories and contracts reached by actors in [SAG-AFTRA](#) and journalists in [NewsGuild](#), whose members had sought protection against AI being used to replace them.

Contemplating such commonwealth workers as those who work in parks, Catanese said: “Their job isn’t going away tomorrow, but gen AI is going to impact it, whether it’s how they’re monitored, how they look at their workload, how they look at security cameras at the park. So whatever agreements are in place, there should be some way for every worker to have a seat at the table to be able to discuss impacts and have a voice in what the future of their work looks like. So I don’t think I spent too much time thinking of which jobs – it was more all jobs.”

Catanese also cited “[impact bargaining](#)” – building on existing collective bargaining agreements to address new circumstances – as a strategy for unions that want to create protections against ways technologies might be used against workers. “When technology is introduced that leads to job loss, like when someone’s furloughed because of a new computer system, the union can say: ‘We legally demand that you negotiate with us over the impact of this.’ That doesn’t mean you can stop it, but you can force a negotiation on how to mitigate some aspects of it, right?”

Conclusion

Both the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and SEIU Local 668 intend to continue to fine-tune AI protections for state workers. The commonwealth will continue meeting with the Generative AI Labor and Management Collaboration Group and is interested in expanding the group to include additional SEIU Local 668 members. The union will continue meeting with the group while evaluating the success of the protections it has achieved. Union leadership has committed to being flexible and to update protections as the technology evolves.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Michelle Miller of the Center for Labor and a Just Economy at Harvard Law School for her introduction to SEIU Local 668, and to Steve Catanese of SEIU Local 668 for his introduction to the team at the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Annex

“Side Letter” Agreement between SEIU Local 668 and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

March 19, 2025



March 19, 2025

Steve Catanese, President
Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 668
2589 Interstate Drive
Harrisburg, PA 17110-9602

RE: Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In accordance with recent discussions on the subject, the parties agree that agencies within the Governor's jurisdiction will operate within the parameters outlined below:

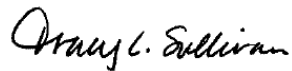
1. "Generative artificial intelligence." The class of models that emulate the structure and characteristics of input data in order to generate derived synthetic content, including information such as images, videos, audio clips or text, that has been significantly modified or generated by algorithms, including by artificial intelligence.
2. A "human in the loop" process is defined as a process where, to the extent generative AI tools are involved in processes, human workers oversee, review, and guide generative AI tool outputs to ensure accuracy, fairness, and compliance with workplace standards.
3. The parties will operate from the premise that generative AI tools and associated systems will be utilized as a tool to assist public employees in supporting the public. A public employee will be considered as defined by Section 301(2) of the Public Employee Relations Act ("PERA"), Act of July 23, 1970, P.L. 563, No. 195, art. III, § 301, 43 P.S. § 1101.301.
4. Employee input will be solicited and considered where generative AI tools may be helpful in reducing inefficiencies and identifying where generative AI tools may create operational issues. In creating the "Generative AI Labor and Management Collaboration Group" ("Group") the parties mutually agree to a productive and empowered structure. The parties agree to establish this Group within 90 days of the execution of this agreement or by a later date with mutual agreement.
 - a) Recommendations through the Group and its processes, including the Group meetings, should include discussions about and identification of efficiencies found as referenced in the "third" item of the Governor's statement issued on March 21, 2025.

5. Generative AI may be used to inform decision makers, but not to make disciplinary decisions. Should generative AI be used to produce outputs that are used by the Commonwealth to support a disciplinary action, the Union may request a copy of said generative AI output.
6. The utilization of generative AI must align with existing policies and laws surrounding the safeguarding of employee information to preserve the confidence and trust of employees.
7. Employees will be provided with training when new generative AI tools are introduced that impact their work.
8. The Commonwealth affirms its commitment to follow Article/Recommendation 33 of the collective bargaining agreement and memorandum of understanding, specifically with the use of generative AI.

The above denotes understandings reached by the parties. Neither party waives any rights, including contractual, bargaining, and other legal rights, not specifically addressed in the above understanding.

Please signify your agreement by signing below and returning a copy to me.

Sincerely,



Tracy Sullivan, Director
Office of Employee Relations
and Workforce Support



3/20/25

Steve Catanese, SEIU-668

Date