



Correctional Officers Rally for Better Wages

(PG 4-5)



Solidarity with CUPW
(PG 6-7)



Bargaining Updates
(PG 10-11)

THE NOVA STAND

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.S. GOVERNMENT & GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION

Winter 2024

Dear members,

As we welcome the arrival of 2025, it's worth taking some time to reflect on the year that was. The year could be summed up in one word: expensive.

Inflation and the cost of living continued to hit people's bank accounts in a negative way. The cost of everything went up and these financial pressures highlighted what the union and its members have known for many years: wages are not keeping up with the cost of living and it's directly impacting people's lives and ability to stay in Nova Scotia.

There was a time in our province when having a good job was enough to provide people with the ability to buy a home, put down roots and raise a family. Today, many people can't afford to live on a single income, they are forced to find other work, work longer hours, or move away in the search of better pay.

The NSGEU will always fight for what is fair. The cuts and freezes of previous governments, plus the impacts of skyrocketing inflation, has hurt people right across the province. The union has worked hard this year to deliver better wages for working people, improve working conditions, and bring greater attention to the need to recruit, and retain people.

There is progress being made: the gap between wages and inflation is closing, those at the bottom of the wage scales are seeing targeted increases, working conditions are getting more attention, and employers are finally doing more to recruit and retain workers.

This is important progress, but there is still much work to be done.

As the calendar turns to a new year, we must remain united and fight to keep our public services public. We must demand safer working conditions. We must ensure wages keep up with the costs that people are forced to deal with every day.

We must also continue to be a leader in advocating for social justice. Too many people can't afford a home or apartment. Social equality, diversity, and inclusion in our workplaces and in our communities must continue to be a priority.



NSGEU executive members, and President Sandra Mullen, were out visiting sites on November 6th to celebrate the work our members for Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week.

As we enter 2025, we do so in a strong position to continue to deliver for our members. The union will start the year with a new Executive Director in Nicole McKim. This year is also a convention year, an opportunity for union renewal and set new objectives and goals for the future.

We will face a government and funding partner with a massive political majority. The union is ready to work with

government and employers to keep delivering the high quality and professional programs and services that Nova Scotians have come to expect. The union will continue to hold government accountable on their commitments, advocate for our members, and work to deliver and protect the best collective agreements possible.

Thank you for your continued solidarity, commitment, and dedication. The union and province are better off because of your work and efforts.

Here's to a productive and successful 2025.

Sandra Mullen
Sandra Mullen

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CONNECT WITH US!

We want to hear from our members. If you have thoughts on this issue of The Stand, or ongoing union issues, send us your feedback! You can email us at inquiry@nsgeu.ca or connect with us:



Hugh Gillis, 1st Vice-President, NSGEU.

The role of 1st Vice-President is to assist the President and work directly with local executives to strengthen the membership and move the unions agenda forward.

If you have any questions, you can contact Hugh at:

hgillis@nsgeu.ca



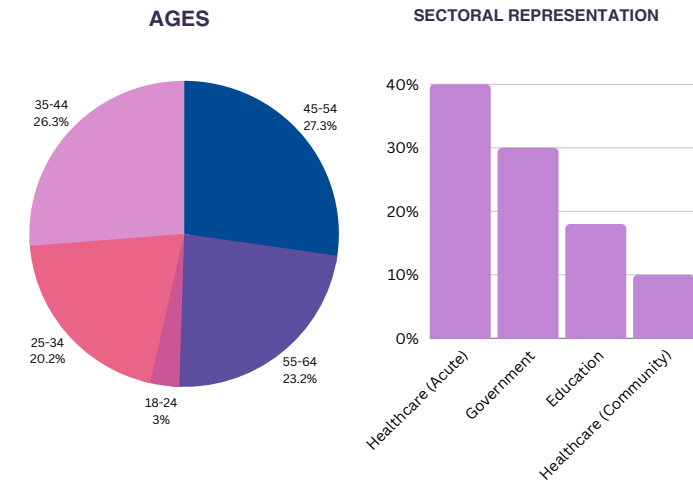
Meet NSGEU's new Executive Director Nicole McKim.



Nicole has held various positions at the NSGEU since 2011, as a Employee Relations Officer, Servicing Coordinator, Director of Negotiations and Servicing for

Government and Education and Director of Finance and Operations. Nicole looks forward to working with the members and staff in her new role.

YOUR UNION AT A GLANCE



NSGEU STAFF



NSGEU HAS 66 PEOPLE ON STAFF THAT WORK TO SERVICE THE UNION MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERS

36,426

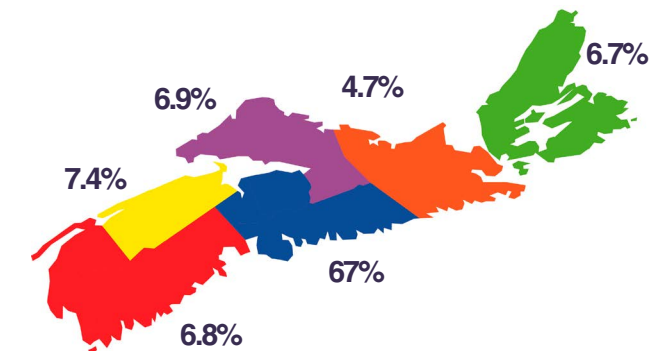
SIGNED MEMBERS

80.2%

FUN FACT

The total number of NSGEU members are equal to more than the populations of Richmond, Inverness and Guysborough Counties combined. Our memberships is large enough to span three counties; that's strength in numbers!

MEMBERS BY REGION



THE STAND

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The NSGEU is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.



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Correctional Officers Rally for Better Wages

Nova Scotia Corrections Officers are the lowest paid in the country and working conditions continue to get worse as staffing levels remain low, putting staff working in these facilities at risk. On December 5 Corrections Officers from across the province came to Halifax to hold an information rally outside the Department of Justice.

The purpose of the rally was to be seen by the employer and send a message that corrections is an important job but the working conditions in the facilities are now exceeding crisis levels. Staff must work extended shifts, and often these shifts are understaffed leaving officers to do their jobs in risky working conditions.

The weather was less than ideal, with rain and high winds, but that did not stop a large gathering of COs and other NSGEU members from coming out and supporting the need for better wages.

Despite the weather, the media took interest in the rally and the COs received extensive media coverage including TV, radio and print. There is now a better understanding of the role of correctional officers in the justice system and the wage disparity across the country. Nova Scotia Sheriffs, who work with the same clientele, earn \$4/hour more than Correctional Officers.

Recruitment and retention of new and existing officers is made harder because these positions are the lowest paid in Canada. Morale within the facilities is low, staff are burnt out, exhausted, dealing with mental health issues, and many are leaving for jobs that better paid and are safer.

NSGEU 1st Vice President Hugh Gillis, a Corrections Officer, attended the rally and stood with members in their fight for a living wage, and safer working conditions.

Those who work in correctional facilities do an important job. They put their health and safety at risk every time they go to work. The employer must recognize that things are getting worse in these facilities and these workers are paying the price. They need government to support their work and work with the union to fix the issues in these facilities.

The new Houston government has appointed Becky Druhan to be the new Minister of Justice. It will be

a top priority in the new year to meet with Minister Druhan, formerly Minister of Education, to discuss this gap in wages and the overall conditions in correctional facilities.

The NSGEU Board has also approved funding to launch a media campaign to keep this issue in the minds of government and the general public. That campaign will be released early in 2025. ■



NSGEU Stands in Solidarity with Canada's Postal Workers

After more than a year of bargaining, on November 15, over 55,000 postal workers initiated a national strike. The employer, Canada Post, stalled at the bargaining table and failed to negotiate any solutions to the unions real concerns. Canada Post made real negotiations even more challenging by threatening more changes to working conditions and leave workers unprotected to layoffs. The union is seeking fair wages, safe working conditions, the right to retire with dignity and the expansion of services at public post offices.

NSGEU President Sandra Mullen, 1st Vice President Hugh Gillis, and NS Federation of Labour Secretary Treasurer Melissa Marsman walked the picket line with workers in Halifax and President Mullen also walked the line with workers in Digby. The NSGEU stands in solidarity with postal workers throughout the province and Canada.

Unprecedented measures have been taken by Canada Post resulting in layoffs two weeks into the strike. Health benefits have also been suspended to these members causing more hardship on the workers.

As the labour dispute moved into its fifth week the federal government stepped in and asked the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to investigate the situation and make a determination if it was likely the two sides could come to a resolution. The CIRB found that the two parties were at an impasse and ordered an end to the work stoppage.

The Federal Labour Minister ordered that the terms of the existing collective agreement will be extended to May 22, 2025. ■



Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Releases Report on Social Workers

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) released a new report entitled *Contradictions in Care: Labour Conditions, Conflicting Values, and Crisis in Child Protection Social Work in Nova Scotia*.

The report was authored by doctors Catherine Bryan, Brooke Richardson, Nancy Ross, and Rajean Willis, and supported in part by the NSGEU. The authors interviewed 15 social workers who were registered with the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers and who were currently or recently employed in Nova Scotia's Department of Community Services. These participants worked in several frontline capacities and were located across the province. The report validates much of the feedback the union has been hearing from members who work in this sector.

NSGEU President Sandra Mullen wrote a letter to the new Minister of Opportunities and Social Development (formerly Department of Community Services) to request a meeting to discuss the findings and action items recommended within this report. (See below)

It's clear that the system is in crisis and that the government has relied far too long on the dedication and commitment of individual workers within the system, often leading to burnout of workers. Significant reform is needed to alleviate the burden being placed on people working in this important sector, and to help create a system that better serves the children and families of Nova Scotia.

The union will continue to advocate and work with the new Minister to ensure meaningful action is taken. ■



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December 13, 2024

Minister Scott Armstrong
Department of Opportunities and Social Development

Dear Minister Armstrong:

Re: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) Report

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Opportunities and Social Development.

I am writing to you today to express my deep concern about the findings of the recent Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report, *Contradictions in Care: Labour conditions, conflicting values, and crisis in child protection social work in Nova Scotia*.

This report, based on in-depth interviews with child protection social workers, paints a troubling picture of a sector in crisis. The report's findings are clear: these workers are overworked, underpaid, and under-supported. They are struggling to cope with high caseloads, insufficient resources, and a lack of meaningful support and supervision. As a result, many are experiencing moral distress and burnout.

I am particularly concerned about the report's findings on the following:

- Caseload overload.** Caseloads consistently exceed child protection social workers' capacity and the legislated caseload caps. These workers are being asked to do too much with too little, and it is putting them and the children and families they serve at risk.
- Time deficiencies.** Child protection workers simply do not have the time they need to provide effective and compassionate care and intervention. This is a direct result of their caseload overload. When workers are forced to juggle too many cases, they are unable to give cases the attention they deserve.
- Constant turnover and chronic understaffing.** A high turnover rate and short-term illness leaves have led to significant staffing deficiencies. This is not surprising, given the challenging working conditions that these workers face. When workers are overworked and under-supported, they are more likely to leave their jobs. This high turnover rate is also contributing to a lack of experience in the sector, as technically junior social workers are assuming senior roles and responsibilities.
- Insufficient training and mentorship.** There is a lack of training for new social workers, and mentorship opportunities are also insufficient. This is a serious

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concern, as it means that new workers are not being adequately prepared for the challenges of the job.

- Misunderstood and devalued:** Child protection social workers often feel misunderstood and devalued by the public, the media, and even within government. This lack of recognition for the complexity and importance of their work contributes to low morale and makes it difficult to attract people to the profession.

Social workers have been raising the alarm for many years and the report's findings are not new information. Government needs to act, the crisis in child protection social work needs to be addressed.

The CCPA report offers several key recommendations to address these challenges:

- Reduce caseloads:** Immediately hire more social workers to ensure manageable caseloads and allow for proper attention to each child's needs.
- Improve working conditions:** Implement measures to address workload stress, provide adequate mental health support, and ensure competitive compensation to attract and retain skilled social workers.
- Invest in prevention and early intervention:** Increase funding for community-based programs that provide families with the support they need to thrive, reducing the need for child protection interventions.
- Enhance training and professional development:** Provide ongoing training opportunities for social workers, particularly in areas such as trauma-informed practice, cultural competency, and mental health.
- Address systemic inequities:** Invest in culturally appropriate services and supports for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous families to reduce their over-representation in the child welfare system.
- Alleviate poverty:** Implement policies and programs that address the root causes of poverty and provide families with the economic resources they need to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children.

NSGEU members working in child protection are dedicated professionals committed to the safety and well-being of children. However, they cannot effectively fulfill their crucial mandate without adequate support and resources from your government.

We urge you to take immediate action to address the urgent concerns raised in the CCPA report and implement the recommendations outlined. The well-being of vulnerable children in Nova Scotia depends on it.

While I understand you are new to the position, the issues outlined in the CCPA report should be familiar to your department's senior leadership. The NSGEU has worked with the Department on solutions to the issues facing child protection social workers, however, this report illustrates the is much more to be done. I would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss the report's findings and recommendations.

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I believe that we can work together to develop a plan to improve the working conditions of child protection social workers and ensure that they have the resources they need to provide high-quality care to children and families.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sandra Mullen
President

SM:tt

Attachment



Nova Scotia General Election 2024 Wrap Up

Tory supermajority, new leader of the opposition, Liberal collapse, and a continued decline in voter turnout. These were the main takeaways from the Nova Scotia General Election that concluded on November 26.

The Houston PCs grew their majority to a whopping 43 (out of 55) seats. This gives the Premier a supermajority which means the PCs control enough seats in the legislature to pass changes to the way the legislature operates. This could mean reducing the number and rules of committees and other procedural rules of the legislature. This has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of the Opposition and give Houston the power and control to forever change the way democracy is implemented in the province. The union will have to be strategic in dealing with the new government and consider the implications of a supermajority on labour relations and bargaining.

The election came as somewhat of a surprise as the first law the Tim Houston PCs passed when they were elected in 2021 was to implement a fixed election date. Nova Scotia was the only province without a fixed election date. However, the PCs used their majority to override the law and called a snap election.

Calling an election without notice to the opposition parties is a huge advantage. The PCs had all their candidates nominated, all their advertising produced and ready for TV, radio, including social media ads and billboards, bus shelters and print material. The day after the election was called, the PCs had all their ads up and their campaign bus was on the road. Both the Liberals

and NDP had a lot of catching up to do.

When the campaign was over Nova Scotia had elected the first woman as Leader of the Official Opposition. Claudia Chender led the NDP to a three seats increase, from six to a total of nine, which was enough seats to become the official Opposition. It's the first time the NDP have been official opposition since Darrell Dexter led the NDP in 2003.

Houston, PCs shut media out of cabinet swearing-in ceremony

Francis Campbell

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Arthur J. LeBlanc, the lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia, presides over the swearing-in ceremony of the 65th General Assembly of Nova Scotia at Province House in Halifax on Tuesday. PHOTO BY TIM KROCHAK /The Chronicle Herald

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party suffered its greatest defeat in 100 years. The Liberals were reduced to just two seats, included in the loss was Liberal Leader Zach Churchill who was defeated in Yarmouth. The Liberals will start the process to rebuild in 2025 with a leadership contest as Churchill announced his resignation as leader.

This general election also included two NSGEU staff. Holly Fraughton (Communications) and Patricia MacDonald (LRO) ran as candidates in the election for the NDP and PCs respectively. Both ran strong campaigns but were unsuccessful in winning their ridings. Nova Scotia's loss is the

union's gain as they have returned to their positions within the union.

Thank you to all the candidates who put their name on a ballot, as well to those who volunteered on a campaign. Now more than ever we need greater attention and participation in our political process, at all levels. The new cabinet includes a shuffle of former ministers and the appointment of several new ones. The union has reached out to the new ministers in those portfolios that directly impact our members so we can start to build relationships and move the priorities of the our members forward. ■



Health Support Bargaining Update

The Health Care Bargaining Council of Unions for Support, after pausing for the provincial general election, has resumed bargaining a

new collective agreement with Nova Scotia Health and IWK.

The Council of Unions for Support has developed a very comprehensive wage package and presented it to the employers on December 5, 2024. The

wage package included significant monetary increases for all classifications and focused on the important role

support members play in the delivery of healthcare to patients. The employers asked for a few weeks to review the wage proposals with the newly elected government and primary funder. Negotiations are scheduled to resume early in the new year.

The essential services negotiation process has not paused and is still ongoing. That committee has met several times with another date scheduled for early January.

Bargaining as a Council of Unions continues to work well, and the committee understands that members are waiting for the details of a new collective agreement.

The election call was an unfortunate delay, but the bargaining committee is looking forward to concluding an agreement in the new year. ■



Provincial Housing Authority Update

Earlier this year the province moved to consolidate all regional housing authorities into a single provincial organization. In March 2024, the Nova Scotia Labour Board denied the employer's application to consolidate all the bargaining units and maintained all existing bargaining rights for members and their respective unions.

The Board decision went on to direct the employer and impacted unions to meet and negotiate various outstanding issues, including inter-regional mobility, pay equity, standardized job descriptions and titles, and other substantive provisions that are likely to impact employees across regional boundaries.

Both the employer and unions were given 12-months to resolve all remaining issues. If agreement could not be reached within the 12-months then either side could apply to the Board for a new order.

The impacted unions and the employer met in June and developed a letter of commitment on how the current and future process will work relating to the labour order. After completing the negotiations on the letter, the employer provided the unions with their first proposal on the issues at hand.

Negotiations took place throughout the summer and fall. The latest negotiations took place in December where more progress was achieved.

The unions were provided with proposals on pay grades relating to different classifications. There were productive discussions throughout the month of December. The parties will meet again on January 24, 2025. The parties have agreed that after the January 24 meeting all outstanding issues will be referred back to the Labour Board for further guidance and decisions. ■

Home Care Bargaining Achieves Important Gains

The NSGEU currently represents close to 1,600 Home Care CCAs in 14 different locals, working in communities from Yarmouth to Cape Breton. At the start of this round of bargaining, employees in eight of those locals did not have "guaranteed hours of work," which means that they had to be available for up to 14 hours per day but may only be scheduled for a few hours. In some agencies, if a client visit was canceled, the employee had to be willing to pick up visits at any time, over a 7-14 day period to ensure they get paid. Employees without a "guaranteed" shift were never certain what to expect on their pay cheques, as client cancellations and other circumstances beyond their control impacted their wages.

With staffing deficits at an all-time high, Home Support CCAs throughout the province expressed that they were feeling burnt out by their workload and members made clear to the union that they had a number of expectations for this round of bargaining.

The union entered bargaining with a goal to achieve guaranteed hours for all Home Support CCA members. Instead of having a lead table, the union bargained all 14 locals (at nine different tables) to make clear to government the entire sector was standing together to achieve necessary improvements.

After almost two years of bargaining, the union is close to achieving a number of improvements for all Home Support members.

For CCAs in Locals 30, 32, 36, 37, 39, 76, 83 and 84 the Union is negotiating significant changes in the hours of work language that will put a guaranteed hours arrangement in place for all permanent employees. ■



Civil Service Bargaining Update

Bargaining continues for members of the Civil Service Bargaining Unit, with the most recent bargaining taking place December 13 and 19, 2024. Unfortunately we could not reach a deal, and the Union filed for conciliation. Dates are expected in January.

On wages, the bargaining committee tabled a four-year agreement with the public sector wage pattern of 5.5% in year one and 2% in year two. For years three and four, the union tabled language designed to better align wages with inflation at 5% in year three and 6% in year four.

The bargaining committee also proposed language that would see any classification that currently earns less than \$20.00 per hour be increased by \$1.00 per hour. In addition, to address the wage disparity within the steps of the various wage scales, the bargaining committee proposed removing the first step of the CL, HSB, SE and TR wage scales, replacing them with a higher step at an increase of 4.08%. Many classifications within these wage scales have fewer steps than others, and they all fall below the other wages scales in terms of average differential between each step. The increase of 4.08% is the existing average differential between steps in the PR wage scales. ■

NSGEU Staff Raise Funds for Toy Drive

Each week NSGEU staff can purchase tickets for \$2 a piece. There is a weekly draw, and the winner gets to take home a fun prize. Those funds are then matched by the union and this year the NSGEU, on behalf of the staff, raised \$4000.

Those funds were used to purchase a van full of toys that were donated to the Q104 Holiday Toy Drive.

This is a wonderful cause and is only made possible because of the work of the staff, most notably Tony Bremner, who continues to champion the cause. Thank you to everyone who takes part in the weekly draws, your efforts will make sure that kids, who might not otherwise have anything, got something under the tree this holiday season. ■



Convention Planning Well Underway

The planning for Convention 2025, which will take place May 21-23, 2025, is well underway.

The amount of work that goes into holding the NSGEU convention is immense. This fall the constitutions, by-laws and resolution committees held meetings to begin the process of building an agenda of work to be discussed, debated, and decided at convention.

Pink Larkin lawyer, David Wallbridge, made a presentation to the committees which included the purpose of



resolutions and how to properly write and consider a resolution. The resolutions considered at convention, by the delegates, establish a vision and direction for the union to follow in the coming years.

Locals are already holding meetings to nominate and determine delegates.

Convention 2025 will be held at the Halifax Convention Centre and will be themed Rise Together.

A special convention edition of The Stand

will be issued in the spring, prior to convention. ■

Steward Profile: Sheila Brophy

Local 104 NSH Eastern Region (Public Health, Addictions, Continuing Care)

How long have you been a steward?

Six-months.

What made you want to become a steward?

To help co-workers.

What issues do you typically deal with in your workplace as a Steward?

How to help and where to go with issues.

Have you faced any discrimination in the workplace by stepping forward to become a Steward?

No.

What kind of skills has being a Steward given you?

Yes, It's very educational and lots of learning.



NSGEU's Cancer Care Fund

The NSGEU administers a special fund for members or their immediate family members who have been diagnosed with cancer and are in need of financial assistance.

The hope is that this will offer a little extra support during a difficult time, providing up to \$300 in gas and/or grocery gift cards to applicants.

This fund was created by the NSGEU Women's Issues Committee in 2011, and since that time, more than \$83,600 has been distributed. In 2023 we gave a total of \$6,900 in gift cards, and for 2024, we gave out a total of \$11,400 in gift cards.

The fund is available for members and their immediate family (immediate family is defined as a spouse, common-law partner, same-sex partner, children, or parent. The latter bonds may be by blood or by legal adoption). When you or your family member is accessing this fund you must know what NSGEU Local you belong to. If you aren't sure of your Local number, you can contact us at inquiry@nsgeu.ca or by calling 902-424-4063 (toll-free 1-877-556-7438).

Click here to apply: <https://fs2.formsite.com/nsgeu/form220/index.html>

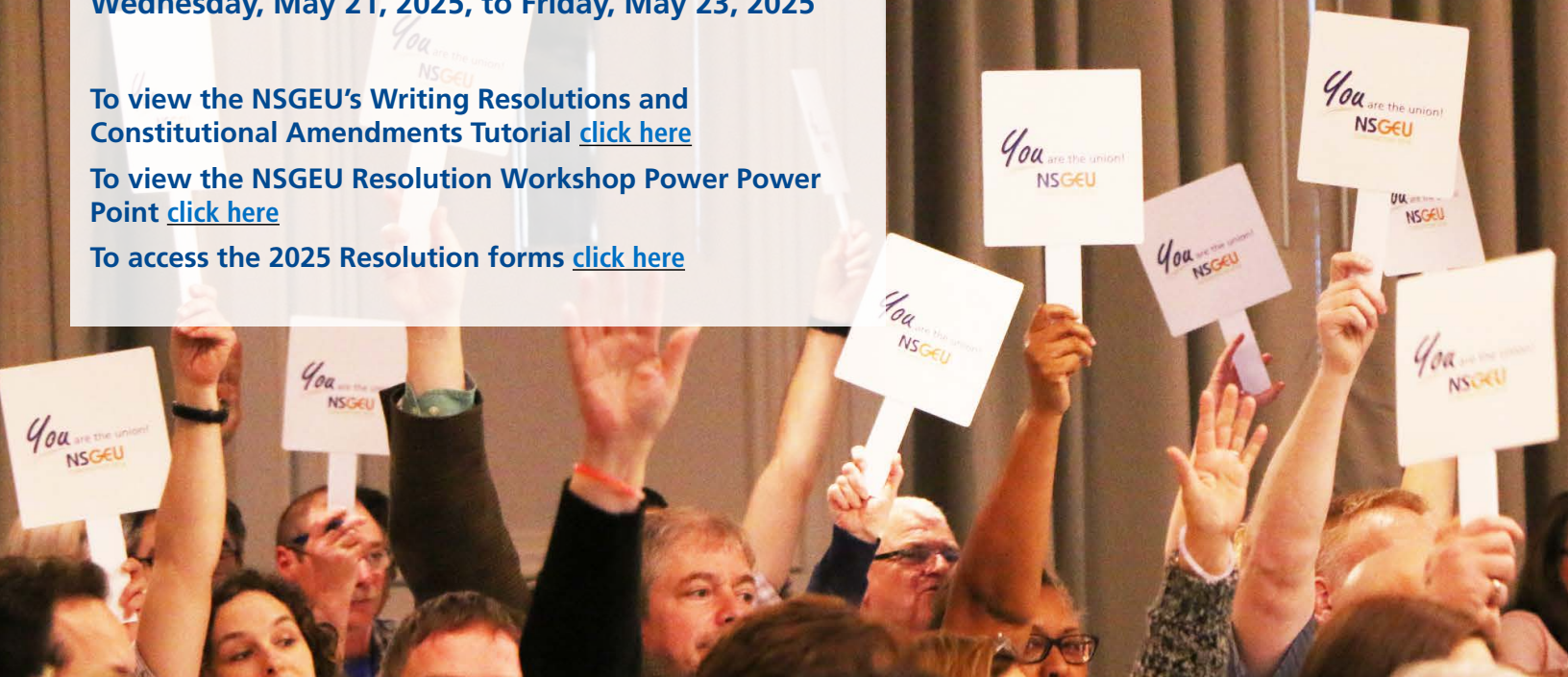
Triennial Convention

The NSGEU's Triennial Convention will be held from Wednesday, May 21, 2025, to Friday, May 23, 2025

To view the NSGEU's Writing Resolutions and Constitutional Amendments Tutorial [click here](#)

To view the NSGEU Resolution Workshop Power Point [click here](#)

To access the 2025 Resolution forms [click here](#)



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