

52nd Annual Conference

Wisconsin Public Employer Labor
Relations Association (WPELRA)



*Working Together:
Navigating
Change in
Wisconsin's
Public Workforce*

January 29 - 30, 2026
[Registration](#)

The Madison Concourse Hotel
[Madison, Wisconsin](#)



Conference At-A-Glance

Thursday, January 29

- 7:15 a.m. - 8:15 a.m. ● New Members' Breakfast
- 7:30 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. ● Registration & Continental Breakfast
- 8:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. ● Welcome - Tara Semenchuk, WPELRA President
- 8:45 a.m. - 10:15 a.m. ● Morning Keynote - Sarah Schillerstrom, SRSD Consulting
- 10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. ● Break
- 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m. ● Morning Breakout Sessions (2)
- 11:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. ● WPELRA Luncheon & Annual Business Meeting
- 1 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. ● Afternoon Keynote - Jim Macy, Acting Administrator, U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division
- 2:15 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. ● Break
- 2:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m. ● Afternoon Breakout Sessions (2)
- 3:45 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. ● State Legislative Update
- 4:30 p.m. - 5 p.m. ● Break
- 5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. ● Hospitality and Networking



Conference At-A-Glance

Friday, January 30

- 8 a.m. - 9 a.m. ● Networking Breakfast
- 9 a.m. - 10:15 a.m. ● Morning Keynote - Dr. Alonzo Kelly, Ph.D.
Kelly Leadership Group
- 10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. ● Break
- 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m. ● Morning Breakout Sessions (2)
- 11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. ● Closing Remarks and Raffle

Registration Now Open!

Member Rate: \$150.00 / Non-Member Rate: \$225.00

2026 WPELRA Annual Training Conference - Event Registration

The Madison Concourse Hotel

<https://www.concoursehotel.com/>

Room Rates: \$101.00 Single / \$139.00 Double / \$149.00 Triple / \$159.00 Quad

Parking: \$20.00

Rates are valid through January 13, 2026

Group ID: WPELRA 2026 Annual Conference or #1206718



2026 WPELRA Annual Conference

Welcome!

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” These timeless words, spoken by President John F. Kennedy, have long resonated with me. They serve as a guiding principle in both my professional journey and the work I lead, reminding me that progress requires courage, adaptability, and a forward-looking mindset.

In our profession, change isn't an occasional visitor; it's a constant companion. Labor agreements evolve every few years. Health plans update annually. Employees retire, new colleagues join us, and policies, manuals, laws, and regulations are written, revised, and refined. Our daily work is shaped by an ongoing cycle of transition and improvement.

Beyond our workplaces, the world around us is shifting just as quickly. Social, political, economic, and environmental changes influence our communities and organizations. Our personal lives shift, too. Marriages, births, kids leaving home, and countless other life moments shape who we are and how we show up at work.

Yet through all this change, one thing has remained steady: our Association and the strength of this community. WPELRA continues to be a source of collaboration, camaraderie, and support. We lean on one another when the unexpected happens. We reach out when we need advice, perspective, or simply a place to vent. We learn from each other, challenge each other, and help each other navigate increasingly complex demands. In a world that requires us to adapt rapidly and thoughtfully, this Association is a constant, and one for which I am deeply grateful.

We also have the privilege of being leaders of change. We influence our organizations' direction, shape the services we provide, implement innovative approaches, and model what it means to support employees through uncertainty. We don't just manage change...we drive it!

President Kennedy reminded us, “Things do not happen. They are made to happen.” As we gather together for the 52nd Annual WPELRA Conference, let's embrace that charge. Let's continue creating, leading, and navigating the change our organizations and communities need and let's keep doing it together.

Respectfully,

WPELRA President
Human Resources Director, City of Janesville

A Message from the President



Thursday

January 29



New **WPELRA** Member Breakfast

7:15 a.m. - 8:15 a.m.

By Invitation Only

Registration/Continental Breakfast

7:30 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Welcome!

8:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.

Tara Semenchuk, Human Resources Director, City of Janesville
WPELRA President



Morning Keynote

8:45 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

Developing Resilience through Radical Responsibility

Sarah Schillerstrom, SRSD Consulting

This keynote dives into the heart of resiliency, offering not just survival strategies but a pathway to thriving in the face of stress, overwhelm, and uncertainty. At its core is the recognition that building resilience is deeply tied to personal responsibility—the responsibility to care for yourself, to identify your needs, and to take deliberate steps toward maintaining your energy and focus. Drawing on her own experience in local government, Sarah shares her journey of developing resilience, emphasizing that the process is neither clear, perfect, nor linear. Her relatable storytelling underscores that setbacks are part of the growth process, and through them, we can emerge stronger when we take ownership of how we respond.

Central to this session is understanding what fuels and drains your energy. By taking personal responsibility for identifying these forces, you can align your focus with what truly matters and where you can have the greatest impact—both professionally and personally. Sarah introduces powerful tools and strategies to help city managers recognize opportunities even in the most challenging circumstances.

Break

10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Thursday

January 29



Breakout Session 1

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Wisconsin Act 29: Navigating New Realities in Workers' Compensation and Employee Benefits

Melissa Bohse, CVMIC

Scott E. Wade, von Briesen & Roper, s.c.



Join a panel of leading experts for an in-depth discussion of Wisconsin Act 29 and its implications for workers' compensation claims in local government. The panel will break down key provisions of the law, highlight emerging trends in claim activity, and explore how municipalities can prepare for and navigate these changes.

This session will also address the growing prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in public sector workplaces. Presenters will share practical strategies, best practices, and organizational measures you can implement to better support employees who experience PTSD symptoms, thereby helping ensure early intervention, improved recovery outcomes, and a healthier, more resilient workforce.



Breakout Session 2

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Owning Your Leadership: Escaping Victim, Villain, and Rescuer Roles

Sarah Schillerstrom, SRSD Consulting

In leadership, it's easy to get caught in the **Drama Triangle** - cycling through the roles of Victim, Villain, and Rescuer. While these patterns are often unconscious, they can erode trust, stifle innovation, and keep teams stuck in cycles of blame, defensiveness, and dependency.

This session will help leaders recognize when they've slipped into the Drama Triangle and, more importantly, how to break free. Participants will learn how taking responsibility shifts the focus from "Who's at fault?" to "What's my role in creating or shifting this?" By doing so, leaders unlock greater creativity, accountability, and empowerment for themselves and their teams. By the end of this session, leaders will have tangible tools to step out of drama and into their full power—leading with clarity, courage, and intention.

Thursday

January 29



WPELRA Luncheon and Annual Business Meeting

11:45 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Tara Semenchuk, WPELRA President

WPELRA is pleased to welcome Roxanne Bonner, President of NPELRA, to this year's conference. Roxanne will share updates on current initiatives at the national level and offer a preview of what attendees can expect at the upcoming NPELRA Annual Training Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Elections for the WPELRA Board of Directors will also be held during the luncheon. Two Board Member positions and the Vice President position are up for election. If you are interested in serving on the Board and contributing to this important organization, please contact Tara Semenchuk prior to the start of the conference at semenchukt@ci.janesville.wi.us.



Afternoon Keynote

1 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.

*“I’m From the Government, and
I’m Here to Help”*

**Jim Macy, Principal Deputy Administrator
U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division**

In 1986 President Reagan famously said “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: ‘I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.’” Here in 2026, one of our own joins us from Washington D.C. to talk about the Wage & Hour Division’s dual pillars of fair and effective enforcement coupled with timely guidance, in efforts to prove that things have significantly changed over the past 40 years.

Jim Macy will provide an update on pending federal initiatives involving Independent Contractors, Joint Employers, the Executive Exemptions, No Tax on Tips and Overtime, and federal FMLA discussions among other pending matters. He will discuss his journey from previously representing many of us at WPELRA to now assisting as senior counsel and administrator at one of the largest federal employment agencies in the country.

Break

2:15 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Thursday

January 29



Breakout Session 1

2:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

The Victim of Mind-Manipulation

Does Not Know They Are The Victim:

Drafting Effective Collective Bargaining Agreement Language

Kyle J. Gulya, Payton L. Rahn, and Hanna R. Kolberg, von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

von Briesen

von Briesen & Roper, s.c. | Attorneys at Law

Interpretation of collective bargaining agreement language is a complicated exercise and Arbitrators deploy many principles to ultimately decide the intent of the parties. This hands-on engaging session will help the human resources professional understand different contract interpretation principles and aids used by arbitrators to discern the intent of the parties along with horror-stories of manipulative interpretations, while also putting the audience in the drafting chair for them to come up with “clear and unambiguous” language in common bargaining situations—or so they might think!



Breakout Session 2

2:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Total Rewards

for a Multi-Generational Workforce

Shanon Swaney, Total Rewards Consultant
Sandy Matz, Employee Benefits Consultant

This session will take an in-depth look at total rewards in the public sector, exploring the critical balance between compensation, benefits, and the overall employee value proposition. Presenters will examine how traditional approaches to pay and benefits compare to evolving workforce expectations and will highlight opportunities for innovation within a municipal or public employer context.

Participants will be challenged to re-evaluate long-standing practices and assess whether their current total rewards strategies meaningfully support organizational goals—particularly in the areas of employee attraction, engagement, and retention. The session will also prompt leaders to consider equity and inclusivity: Are current offerings meeting the needs of the entire workforce, or only certain groups?

Thursday

January 29



State Legislative Update

3:45 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Jerry Deschane, Executive Director - League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Kyle Christianson, Wimmer & Company

What happens at the state and federal level impacts county and municipal government. Join seasoned political expert Jerry Deschane as he reviews upcoming political and legislative issues impacting Wisconsin and at the federal level.

Break

4:30 p.m. - 5 p.m.

Hospitality and Networking

5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Sponsored by:

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Join your fellow WPELRA members during this networking opportunity!

Ask an Attorney!
Connect with a Consultant!
Say Hello to a Sponsor!
Catch Up with a Colleague!

Friday

January 30



Networking Breakfast

8 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Enjoy a complimentary breakfast with your colleagues and take a moment to visit with our conference sponsors. This dedicated time offers an excellent opportunity to learn more about the products, services, and expertise they provide to support public-sector employers. Their ongoing partnership is essential to the success of the annual WPELRA conference, and we encourage you to stop by, say hello, and thank them for their continued support!

While you're there, don't forget to complete a raffle ticket for your chance to win one of our great conference prizes! It's a simple way to participate, connect, and start your morning on a fun note.



Morning Keynote

9 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

Navigating the Terrain of Change (Without Losing Our Sanity!)

Dr. Alonzo Kelly, Kelly Leadership Group

This full participatory presentation is designed to assist in creating curious and competent work environments that invite curiosity which results in intentional results. This learning journey will focus on the concepts of Accountability, Courage, Humility and Empowerment required of all members of a team to see, receive, and respond to the world around us.

This discussion will utilize critical thinking skills to make authentic inquiry, apply appropriate meaning to terms and phrases, problem solve, communicate confidently, and foster more collaborative work environments rooted in authentic relationships. The key concepts of this session include 1) Creating a sense of urgency, 2) Creating a 'culture of accountability' and 3) Crucial Conversations; High Stakes/Strong Emotions/Opposing Opinions.

Break

10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Friday

January 30



Breakout Session 1

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Beyond the Spreadsheet: The Human Side of Data in Collective Bargaining

Patrick Glynn, Principal Consultant, BoldPath Consulting, LLC



Local governments are surrounded by more information than ever, but knowing how to make sense of it can feel tricky. This session helps HR and labor relations professionals transform everyday information into clear, confident decisions that withstand scrutiny. We'll look at practical ways to understand your organization's internal realities, make meaningful comparisons to others, and recognize the financial context that defines what's possible. Along the way, you'll learn how to decide which numbers strengthen your position and which ones are best left in the background. Through relatable examples drawn from Wisconsin's local government landscape, you'll leave with a practical, plain-language framework for using data in bargaining; one that builds confidence, consistency, and credibility at the table.

Breakout Session 2

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Breaking Down Relationships Between Elected Officials and Administration

Andy Phillips, Attolles Law, s.c.



There are significant differences between the private and public sectors when it comes to the important work of personnel administration. One of the challenges arises from navigating the relationship between elected officials and employed staff and administration. This session will explore that relationship to provide an understanding of how to ensure you are positioned for success.

Closing Remarks and Raffle

11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

**2026 WPELRA
Annual Conference**

General

Information



Conference Registration

2026 WPELRA Annual Training Conference - Event Registration

Member Rate: **\$150.00** / Non-Member Rate: **\$225.00**

Registration closes on **January 23, 2026**

Cancellations

For all cancellations, a **\$35** administrative fee will be deducted. All cancellation requests must be submitted in writing and received by **January 15, 2026**, to qualify for a refund.

Cancellations received after **January 15, 2026**, are non-refundable.

No shows and inability to attend the conference due to inclement weather, are non-refundable.

Dress Code: Business Casual

The Madison Concourse Hotel

<https://www.concoursehotel.com/>

Room Rates: **\$101.00** Single / **\$139.00** Double / **\$149.00** Triple / **\$159.00** Quad

Parking: **\$20.00**

Additional parking available within one block of the hotel

Rates are valid through **January 13, 2026**

Group ID: WPELRA 2026 Annual Conference or #1206718

WPELRA will provide the GUIDEBOOK app to be used during your time at the conference.

Plan your day with a personalized schedule, sponsor info, and more.

Keep an eye out on your email for a link to download before you arrive at the conference.



Thank You!

2026 WPELRA Annual Conference Sponsors

WPELRA would like to extend a "Thank You" to all of the Sponsors of the 2026 Annual Conference, which would not be possible without their continued support. We truly appreciate you!

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