

WHERE DO YOUR UNION DUES GO?

A LOOK AT MONTANA FEDERATION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES (MFPE) IN 2023



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The **Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE)** is Montana's largest public sector union, representing over 19,000 teachers and other public employees in Montana. Since 2019, MFPE has lost nearly 3,600 members, approximately 15 percent of its membership. As a labor union that represents both public and private sector employees, MFPE files a Form LM-2 financial disclosure with the United States Department of Labor. MFPE's financial disclosure reports may help explain why the union has suffered such large membership losses.

MFPE's latest financial disclosure, covering September 1, 2022, to August 31, 2023, reveals that less than one in every four dollars the union spent went toward representing membership. "Representational Activities," the expense category most closely associated with a union's primary duty of representing membership, accounted for only 24.6 percent of all expenditures. In other words, **an MFPE member paying \$390 in annual dues only saw \$95 of their dues go to negotiating contracts, representing workers in grievance proceedings, and other primary duties of a union.** It is no wonder why MFPE is losing so many members.

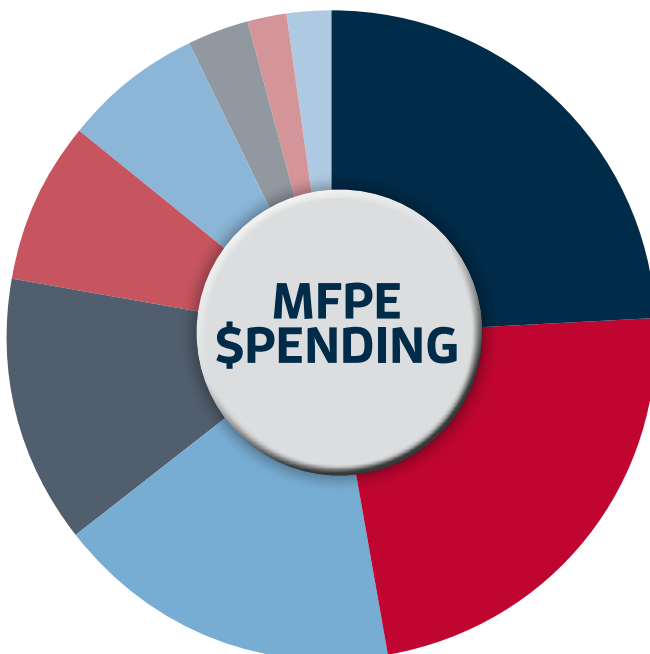
Most of MFPE's spending went toward union operations. General overhead, union administration, union employee benefits, and per capita tax paid to affiliated unions accounted for a combined 52.2 percent of all expenses. Most notably,

MFPE sent \$2.9 million to affiliated unions for per capita tax payments. MFPE is one of five merged state-level teachers' unions that are affiliated with both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA). This per capita tax spending helps support NEA and AFT's programmatic objectives. For more information on how NEA and AFT spend membership dues and per capita tax payments, see "**Where do your national union dues go?**"

MFPE spent \$2.2 million on benefit costs, such as health insurance and pension contributions, for its own employees. MFPE executive compensation was also a top expense. MFPE's Executive Director, Erik Burke, earned \$164,363 in 2023. This is roughly three times the average public school teacher's salary in Montana. MFPE's President, Amanda Curtis, earned \$148,959 in 2023. Since 2020, Curtis' salary has increased by 37.6 percent. Curtis and Burke earned a combined \$313,322, the equivalent of 803 members' annual dues.

With decreasing membership and increasing administrative costs, MFPE's financial position has worsened. Since 2021, the union's net financial position worsened by over \$900,000. During the same time, MFPE's assets decreased by more than \$1.5 million. **In 2022, MFPE spent roughly \$1.1 million more than it took in, forcing the union to dip into its cash reserves to cover expenses.**

MFPE SPENDING 2023



- 24% :: REPRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES
- 23% :: PER CAPITA TAX
- 17% :: BENEFITS
- 13% :: ALL OTHER
- 8% :: UNION ADMINISTRATION
- 7% :: POLITICAL ACTIVITIES & LOBBYING
- 3% :: GENERAL OVERHEAD
- 2% :: CONTRIBUTIONS, GIFTS, & GRANTS
- 2% :: FEES, FINES, ASSESSMENTS, ETC.

MFPE POLITICAL SPENDING

According to federal law, unions can use membership dues for a variety of political activities, such as issue advocacy, get-out-the-vote drives, election mailers, lobbying, and public marketing campaigns. The *Janus v. AFSCME* Supreme Court decision relieves nonmembers from the obligation to pay any dues or fees to the union as a condition of public employment. **However, for teachers who remain MFPE members, *Janus* changes nothing about how unions spend dues: they are still routinely used for political purposes.** During the latest reporting period, MFPE reported spending:

\$617K

on MFPE officers and employees as compensation for their political and lobbying activities.

\$142K

on consultants for their assistance with MFPE's political activities and lobbying efforts.

\$119K

for digital advertising related to MFPE's political objectives.

\$45K

on political mailers sent to MFPE members.

\$14K

for a polling firm to collect information on candidates for public office in Montana.

In addition to the above political spending, MFPE operates a political action committee (PAC) that members fund through voluntary contributions. **During the 2021-22 election cycle, MFPE PAC spent \$963,624. Of this, \$348,970 went to Democratic candidates and causes, and \$0 went to Republicans.** The remaining \$614,654 went to various vendors for services related to MFPE's political activity.



MFPE ENDORSES DEMOCRAT CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



6 Democrats



0 Republicans



MFPE also endorses candidates for public office. **For the 2024 election, MFPE endorsed 6 Democrats and 0 Republicans for statewide and district offices.** MFPE made 71 endorsements in state legislative elections, endorsing 60 Democrats, 10 Republicans, and one independent. This one-sided political activity is surely not representative of MFPE's membership.

MFPE members pay dues to the union's two national affiliates, NEA and AFT. For more information on how NEA and AFT spend membership dues, see the links below:

[NEA: Where do your union dues go?](#)

[AFT: Where do your union dues go?](#)

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