



**Business Manager
Secretary-Treasurer**
Michael Hogan

585 Aero Drive
Cheektowaga, NY
14225

PHONE
716.565.0303

FAX
716.565.0306

WEBSITE
www.dc4.org



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District Council #4

International Union of
PAINTERS AND ALLIED TRADES OF AMERICA AND CANADA, AFL-CIO-CLC

Greetings Members of the Legislature,

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My name is [REDACTED] and I am a proud member of District Council 4 of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. I appreciate the opportunity to share my story in support of the New York For All resolution.

I was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the United States when I was five years old. Like many families, mine came here looking for opportunity and stability. I grew up here. I went to school here. This is my home.

For twelve years, I worked as a drywall finisher for non-union contractors in Western New York. During that time, I was not treated as an employee, even though I worked full-time, followed directions from supervisors, and relied on that work to support my family. Instead, I was misclassified as a subcontractor. This meant that the companies I worked for avoided paying their fair share of taxes and insurance, and those costs were pushed onto me.

Because of that misclassification, I had to pay self-employment taxes, cover my own insurance, and take on financial risks that no worker in my position should have to carry. There were no benefits, no protections, and no security. If I got hurt, I was on my own. If work slowed down, I had no safety net. This system took advantage of me and many others like me.

Despite all of that, I worked hard. I showed up every day, did quality work, and contributed to building this community.

Eventually, I joined District Council 4. Becoming part of the union changed my life. For the first time, I had fair wages, proper classification, benefits, and dignity on the job. I had protections that every worker deserves. I was finally treated as a professional, not as a disposable laborer.

But even now, as a union member and as a U.S. citizen, I live with a fear that many people do not understand.

I am a Latino man. I have brown skin. And I worry that, regardless of my citizenship, I could be targeted, stopped, or detained by immigration enforcement simply because of how I look or how I speak. I have seen and heard stories of people being questioned or picked up without regard for their actual legal status.

That fear is real. It affects how I move through my own community. It affects my sense of safety for myself and my family.

No one who lives and works here, especially someone who is a citizen, should have to worry about being treated like they do not belong because of the color of their skin. Local resources should not be used in a way that contributes to that kind of fear and uncertainty.

The One New York For All resolution is important because it draws a clear line. It says that our local law enforcement should focus on keeping our communities safe, not on acting as an extension of federal immigration enforcement. It helps ensure that people can go to work, take their kids to school, and participate in their communities without fear.

When workers are afraid, they are less likely to report wage theft, unsafe working conditions, or exploitation. That allows bad actors, like the contractors who misclassified me for years, to continue breaking the law and undercutting responsible employers.

Protecting workers and protecting communities go hand in hand. I am proud to be from Puerto Rico. I am proud to be an American. I am proud to be a union member. And I am proud to stand here today asking you to support this resolution.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

PAINTERS - DECORATORS - PAPERHANGERS - DRYWALL FINISHERS - STRUCTURAL STEEL - CIVIL SERVICE - GLAZIERS & GLASS WORKERS - SIGN PAINTERS - PAINT MAKERS & ALLIED INDUSTRIAL WORKERS