

CWA Joins Fight To Save the Universal Service Fund

The **Universal Service Fund (USF)** was established in the United States in 1997 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under the **Telecommunications Act of 1996**. Its purpose was to ensure that all Americans, regardless of their location, income level, or whether they lived in urban or rural areas, had access to affordable telecommunications services. The fund was created to support programs that promote broadband and telecommunications service availability in underserved and rural areas, assist low-income consumers, and help schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities connect to communications networks.

The USF is funded through fees collected from telecommunications providers, which are passed on to consumers through their phone bills. If the **Universal Service Fund** were to be discontinued or significantly reduced, it could negatively impact several groups of people and communities:

- **Rural Areas:** Rural communities would likely experience reduced access to affordable telecommunications and broadband services. Many rural areas are already underserved in terms of infrastructure, and without the USF, it could become even harder for companies to justify the investment in these areas due to the lower population density and higher costs of service.
- **Low-Income Consumers:** The **Lifeline Program** helps millions of low-income families afford basic phone and internet services. Without the USF, many of these individuals and families might lose access to vital communication services, making it harder to access emergency services, job opportunities, and education.
- **Educational Disparities:** The **E-Rate Program** helps schools and libraries, especially in underserved areas, get access to broadband services. If this funding were cut, students in lower-income or rural areas might lose access to crucial online resources, widening the educational divide between urban and

rural areas.

- **Healthcare Access in Rural Areas:** The **Rural Health Care Program** enables telehealth services, which are particularly crucial in remote areas where access to healthcare providers may be limited. Without the USF, rural healthcare facilities may lose access to affordable telecommunications services, reducing the availability of remote healthcare services and potentially affecting patient care.
- **Economic Impact:** The removal of these programs could increase the digital divide, limiting job opportunities, education, and access to healthcare. This could disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including people in rural areas and lower-income families, thus increasing social inequality.



In 2021, a challenge to the Universal Service Fund (USF) was brought forth by a group of telecommunications companies, including Comcast, Charter Communications, and others broadband carriers. That group filed a petition for review in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. The petition challenged the way the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was applying USF fees, particularly related to broadband services.

The case was initially reviewed by the D.C. Circuit, but after its ruling, the companies sought to bring the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that the FCC's authority to assess and collect these fees was overreaching. The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in 2024. This legal challenge focuses on the broader question of regulatory authority and the funding mechanisms for telecommunications programs like the USF, with potential implications for future telecommunications policy.

This case has significant implications for the future of the USF, as it could lead to changes in how telecommunications services are funded and the extent to which the government can regulate and support the industry, particularly in rural and low-income areas. The Court's review could address questions related to the authority of federal agencies, the constitutionality of certain funding mechanisms, and the overall fairness of the system.

On Wednesday, March 26, 2025, officers, stewards and members from CWA Local 2108, CWA Local 2107, CWA Local 2336 and numerous advocacy groups attended a rally near the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, marking the day that the Supreme Court was to start hearing arguments on the case.

The Universal Service Fund has been crucial in promoting equality in access to telecommunications and broadband services across the country. Discontinuing or severely reducing it would exacerbate the digital divide, hurt low-income and rural communities, and create significant barriers to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity.



CWA is pleased to announce that the Avaya Bargaining Committee has reached a Tentative Agreement (TA) with Avaya. After careful review and discussion, the Committee recommends ratification of this agreement.

Since December 2023, members have been working under terms unilaterally imposed by Avaya. Ratification of this agreement will restore all bargained-for items, ensuring stronger protections and benefits for our members. Additionally, the agreement includes a \$1,500 ratification bonus.

CWA Local 2108 will be conducting the ratification process by mail and will be concluded on April 18, 2025.

Highlights of this tentative agreement are as follows:

Agreed-To Financial Terms: 11.02.23 CBA Execution Version, Subject to Ratification

Term	
Wage Increases (Art. 18, § 2)	5.5%, 4.5%, 4%: 5.5% increase at ratification, 4.5% increase on one-year anniversary of the CBA, 4.0% increase on two-year anniversary of the CBA.
Ratification Bonus (Art. 18, § 9)	\$1500: Within 30 days of the ratification date of the Agreement, a lump sum payment of \$1500 will be paid to each bargaining unit employee that is active on the effective date.
Annual Incentive Bonus (Art. 19)	\$500: Paid to eligible employees regardless of Company performance, as reflected in full text of CBA.
Medical Plan Contributions (Art. 23, § 1)	No split: During the term of this Agreement, the Company shall be responsible for 100% of the cost of annual premiums under the Medical Plan and each employee shall be responsible for 0% of the cost of the annual premium.
Termination Payments (Art. 34)	Current Bargaining Unit Employees (all bargaining unit employees employed by the Company on the effective date of the new contract) shall be eligible to receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible Terminations During Term of Agreement: Termination Payments in the same amounts as under the 2009 CBA for any eligible termination. New Hires (all bargaining unit employees whose start date is after the effective date of the new contract) shall be eligible to receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Termination Payments: Employees hired after the ratification date of this Agreement shall only be entitled to Termination Payments up to a maximum of fifty-two (52) weeks for any eligible terminations.
Layoffs (Art. 33, § 3)	No Layoffs for Six (6) Months: Company agrees to no involuntary layoffs for the first six (6) months of the Agreement but may implement voluntary leave programs consistent with current 2009 CBA language.
Certification Bonus Program (Art. 39, § 4)	“Grandfathered In” for Eighteen (18) Months: Program to end eighteen (18) months after the effective date of the new CBA.
Special Retirement Payment (Art. 34)	Special Retirement Payment: For term of the Agreement, for Current Bargaining Unit Employees, upon any retirement from employment that does not qualify for a Termination Payment above, in addition to the employee’s right to pension benefits and any other benefits or payments required under this Agreement, the employee shall receive a one-time separation payment of \$5,000.
Retiree Benefits (Art. 23, § 5)	Eliminated: As of the effective date of the new CBA, the Company shall have no obligations (including with respect to any contribution, coverage, payment, sponsorship, or subsidy), for any retiree or other post-employment benefits relating to any health, dental or welfare plan.
Pension Plan (Art. 25)	Bargaining unit employees’ participation in and rights under the Avaya Pension Plan shall continue for the duration of this Agreement on the same terms and conditions as in effect immediately prior to the effective date of this Agreement (which terms and conditions are controlled and governed by the Avaya Pension Plan official plan documents).
Avaya 401(k) Savings Plan (Art. 24)	The Company agrees to maintain the current contributions and matches for the 401(k) plan: for eligible employees, the Company will contribute sixty-six and two-thirds percent (66-2/3%) of the sum of the pre-tax and after-tax contributions up to the first six percent (6%) of eligible compensation.
Additional Financial Increases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management Relief Differential (Art. 39, § 3(D)): The Company agrees to increase the Management Relief Differential to \$20. Per Diem Expenses (Art. 21, § 3(a)): The Company agrees to increase the per diem rates to the gsa.gov per diem rates. Relocation Allowance (Art. 33, § 6): The Company agrees to increase the relocation allowance amounts the lesser of (1) the termination allowance for which they would have been eligible upon layoff with a minimum relocation allowance of \$8,500 or (2) \$20,000. Academic Awards (Art. 28, § 3): The Company agrees to increase the amount for the Academic Award to \$8,000 per year. Tuition Assistance (Art. 28, § 2): The Company agrees to maintain the current Tuition Assistance Plan for the term of the Agreement (2009 CBA does not require Company to maintain this program).
Additional Terms	All other terms to be agreed to as in 10.25.23 CBA Execution Version, Subject to Ratification.

THE RISKS OF SATELLITE INTERNET




Satellite company CEOs are pushing the U.S. Commerce Department and state broadband offices to prioritize funding for unreliable satellite internet service and cut back on plans to build fiber optic internet connections.

Policy makers, telecom workers, and consumers should be very skeptical of satellite technology.

Satellite is not a long-term connectivity solution. It does not provide the speed and reliability that families and businesses need to keep up with online video and interactive content. And there’s little room for growth: satellite connection speeds go down with an increase in users.

Satellites also have higher recurring costs. The ongoing infrastructure cost - purchasing and launching new satellites - is enormous. The companies themselves say satellites only have a five-year life span, after which they require another big investment.

Satellite employs fewer workers and there are currently no union-represented satellite internet providers. Public funds should help create good jobs in our communities, not boost the profits of billionaire-owned satellite companies.

TAKE ACTION

Tell the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to stand up to pressure to redirect funds to unreliable satellite internet service and continue to create good, union jobs by investing in reliable, high-speed fiber internet.

Make Sure that Public Funding Supports Fiber Buildout.



Scan the QR code or visit CWA.org/ProtectOurWork

Sign the petition now!!

Zenimax Workers Vote Overwhelmingly to Authorize Strike

Video game workers at Microsoft subsidiary ZeniMax Media—represented by Communications Workers of America Locals 2108, 2100, and 6215 (ZeniMax Workers United-CWA)—has overwhelmingly voted, by more than 94%, to authorize union leadership to call for a strike. ZeniMax Workers United-CWA and Microsoft have been negotiating for a first contract for nearly two years.

"We're not afraid to use our union power to ensure that we can keep making great games," said ZeniMax Workers United-CWA Local 2108 Member and Senior QA Tester Skylar Hinnant. "All of us want to be working. We hope that Microsoft will allow us to do so with dignity and fairness to all by securing a first contract with our union."

Members of the ZeniMax Workers United-CWA bargaining committee are continuing to take a stand at the table over better wages, work-place improvements, and key concerns, including a lack of remote work options and the company's replacement of in-house quality assurance work with outsourced labor without notifying the union. Before a series of nationwide member rallies, including when ZWU-CWA members walked off the job in Maryland and Texas on a one-day work stoppage, CWA filed an unfair labor practice charge against Microsoft for unilaterally outsourcing work.

In January 2023, ZeniMax Workers United-CWA formed the first video game studio union at Microsoft, representing over 300 quality assurance workers in Maryland and Texas. ZeniMax Media is a video game production company known for its popular games such as Fallout, The Elder Scrolls, Doom, and more.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Strikers Vow to Carry On

Late last month, striking production and advertising workers at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PPG) accepted a buyout offer after the newspaper outsourced production of its print edition, eliminating 31 union jobs. Journalists and newsroom staff represented by the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh (TNG-CWA Local 38061) **remain on strike**. "The Post-Gazette chose to outsource jobs rather than do the right thing and bargain," said CWA District 2-13 Vice President Mike Davis. "They have not bargained in good faith, but we have stood together to negotiate the best possible severance package for the production and advertising workers. As always, we have their backs, and we know that they will continue to stand in solidarity with our striking journalists for justice at the Post-Gazette."

With some workers having been on strike for 29 months, CWA's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette strike is the longest-running current strike in America. Journalists, editors, artists, and other workers went on an unfair labor practice strike demanding the company bargain in good faith and restore the terms of the contract it illegally, unilaterally tore up, including slashes to health care, time off, and other core tenets of any union contract.

"They leave this strike with best wishes and admiration from the members of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh," wrote striking PPG journalist and member of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh-CWA Ed Blazina. "We are proud to have stood alongside these folks during this bitter strike. And we will carry on striking with their fight and sacrifice very much in our minds and hearts. For two and a half years, they have fought against an employer set on destroying them. Our union siblings have simply made the best deal they can so they can move on with their lives. For us Guild members, the strike goes on as we are in a different position."

On February 27, a 3rd Circuit Court panel of judges heard oral arguments from the company and the National Labor Relations Board over a request by the board to enjoin the company to restore the terms of the contract it unlawfully discarded in 2020. Strikers are awaiting a decision any day now.

Congratulations to Recent Retiree:



Thomasine Hill



CWA Health Care Benefit Coordinators Can Handle Your Verizon Benefit Issues

The current HCBC assignments for Verizon employees are as follows:

Tom Ballek, Retiree HCBC for Medical, Dental and Enrollment Issues
866-248-4449 - Thomas.L.Ballek@verizon.com

Ines Millard, Actives' Medical, Dental, Vision Disability and Enrollment
888-571-7218 - Ines.I.Millard@verizon.com

Jodi Grant, Actives' Medical, Dental, Vision, Disability and Enrollment
888-324-4969 - Jodi.I.Grant@core.verizon.com

The HCBC's can handle issues from any active or retired Mid-Atlantic CWA (MD, DC, VA, NJ, PA, WV, DE) represented members, regardless of their home state.

Thinking About Retirement?

You may want to check out these important workshops presented by **Networth Financial** Group to see if the reality of retirement is on your horizon!!

Markets in Motion

Thursday, April 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM
Via Zoom

Retirement Cash Flow Planning

Tuesday, April 22, 2025 @ 6:30PM
Via Zoom

Reservations are required and to RSVP you may call Networth at (800)-859-2212, or register online at :

<http://www.networth.net/event/marylanddcvirginia>



RMC 2108 Retirees Corner

The good weather is just a bought here and I'm thinking with all this nice weather, we should have an awesome turn-out at this month's meeting.

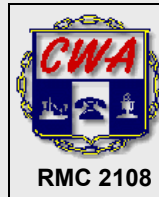
There are many things that may affect us retirees popping up on the national stage that we need to discuss. Many of these issues may cause serious repercussions if we don't get involved and fight back.

So plan on attending this month's meeting to stay informed about new legislative movements.

Our next luncheon meeting will be on April 9th at 11:00am, if you care to bring desserts for the luncheon, it will be much appreciated.

Be Safe!!

Calvin C Foster Jr
President- RMC 2108



The CWA Joseph A. Beirne Foundation Scholarship Program

The CWA Joe Beirne Foundation was established in October 1974 by the Communications Workers of America Executive Board to honor the name and memory of the founding President of CWA, who served for more than 30 years. In his capacity as the first CWA President, Joe Beirne took great pride in the roles he played in the fields of education and learning and other areas of social concern.

Sixteen partial college scholarships of \$4,000 each are being offered for the 2025-2026 school year. Winners, selected in a lottery drawing, also will receive second-year scholarships of the same amount contingent upon satisfactory academic accomplishment. Part-time students, less than 12 credits, will receive half of the scholarship monies.

Eligible for the awards are CWA members and their spouses, children and grandchildren, including those of retired or deceased members. Applicants must be high school graduates or at least high school students who will graduate during the year in which they apply. Undergraduate and graduate students returning to schooling may also apply.

Applications are accepted during the months of November through April. **Final deadline for the 2025-2026 school year is April 30, 2025.**

To apply online, go to:

<http://www.cwa-union.org/pages/beirne>

CWA Members Save 25% off Easter Flowers

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Local 2108 Calendar

APRIL 2025

- 9 RMC 2108 Meeting - 11:00am
Local Office, Beltsville, MD
- 9 Membership Meeting - 6:00pm
Local Office, Beltsville, MD
- 20 Easter Sunday



MAY 2025

- 6-7 Advanced Stewards Training
Local Office, Beltsville, MD
- 11 Mother's Day



- 14 RMC 2108 Meeting - 11:00am
Local Office, Beltsville, MD
- 14 Membership Meeting - 6:00pm
Local Office, Beltsville, MD
- 26 Memorial Day
Local Office Closed

WEINGARTEN RIGHTS

If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated or have any effect on my personal working conditions, I respectfully request my union representative, officer or steward to be present at this meeting. Without union representation, I choose not to participate in this discussion.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Membership Meeting - Wednesday, April 9, 2025 - 6:00pm
RMC 2108 Meeting - Wednesday, April 9, 2025 - 11:00am



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