

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MONDAY JANUARY 27, 2020

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RAFAEL ESPINAL SELECTED TO LEAD 500,000-MEMBER FREELANCERS UNION

Will Oversee 50-State Strategy for Influential Union’s Expansion, Increase Safety Net Protections for 57 Million Independent Workers Nationwide

Espinal a Key Figure in Championing Historic Freelancer Wins in NYC

NEW YORK, NY – Rafael Espinal has been named as the next executive director of the 500,000-member Freelancers Union, the largest and fastest-growing organization representing independent workers nationwide. Espinal, who currently serves on the New York City Council and has been a prominent voice for freelancer rights, will assume the post on March 2, 2020.

“Independent workers are now one-third of the U.S. workforce and have a huge amount at stake in our changing economy,” said **Hanan Kolko, chair of the Freelancers Union Board of Directors**. “Rafael is the ideal person to expand our reach nationally, build our membership, and amplify the voices of freelancers in important policy debates. We’re thrilled to have him on board.”

Espinal will lead what he calls a “50-state strategy to protect the freelance workforce,” which includes expanding safety net protections for the country’s 57 million independent workers and building the union’s membership and political influence. An early focus will be working with cities and states to replicate model freelancer-rights legislation promoted by Freelancers Union and recently passed in New York City and New York State.

Freelancers Union was founded in 1995 by Sara Horowitz and quickly became the preeminent political voice for this diverse and growing workforce. Its key victories and achievements include:

- Leading the campaign for the first-of-its-kind Freelance Isn’t Free Act in New York City, which gives freelancers unprecedented protection from nonpayment and late payment
- Innovating the first-ever portable benefits model for freelancers, expanding their access to affordable health insurance and other key benefits
- Developing the preeminent annual survey of the U.S. freelance workforce, *Freelancing in America*
- Leading the successful campaign to repeal an unfair double-tax on NYC freelancers known as the Unincorporated Business Tax
- Creating Freelancers Hub, a free coworking space and training and resource center for NYC freelancers
- Offering monthly educational and community-building events for freelancers in nearly two dozen cities across the country

Espinal’s vision for the organization includes taking these achievements to a national level, increasing political engagement from members, and creating new forward-thinking services to support freelancers.

He will be only the third leader in the organization’s 25-year history, succeeding Caitlin Pearce.

“Following the great legacy of Sara Horowitz and the leadership of Caitlin Pearce, I am deeply honored to be able to take on this new role,” **Rafael Espinal** said. “Whether it be to supplement their income or gain more flexibility, independent work is the way of the future as more and more people are embracing freelancing. Under my leadership, Freelancers Union will continue to lead the way in building a new system of benefits and protections for independent workers.”

Espinal's immediate tasks will also include bringing freelancers of all types into the conversation about proposed worker classification legislation in various states.

“We need new leaders who will listen to the freelance workforce and innovate on their behalf in the policy arena and through advocacy and organizing, said **Freelancers Union Founder Sara Horowitz**. “Rafael is the rare leader who has the ability to navigate the complex challenges of the growing freelance economy.”

Espinal, who serves the 37th District in Brooklyn, was a co-sponsor of the Freelance Isn't Free legislation that passed in New York City in 2016—a historic win for the city's 1.3 million freelancers. He co-sponsored a bill that passed in 2019 to extend protections against harassment and discrimination to independent workers under the city's Human Rights Law.

“Rafael is a passionate and committed advocate for working people who has fought to protect and support the diverse community of freelancers in New York City,” said **Freelancers Union's outgoing executive director, Caitlin Pearce**. “I am thrilled to see him take the reins and lead the next chapter at Freelancers Union to build a more just and sustainable working environment for independent workers nationwide.”

A native of Brooklyn and the son of Dominican immigrants who were union workers as well as freelancers, Espinal was elected to his City Council post in 2013, after serving two years in the New York State Assembly.

He is a graduate of Queens College and served as an adult literacy teacher and as a chief of staff in the New York City Council before running for elective office.

Espinal's legislative accomplishments on the City Council include negotiating a \$250 million comprehensive investment plan for his district, one of New York's most underserved. The New York Times Editorial Board said in 2019, “In a 51-member body, Mr. Espinal has been a standout.” *Time Out* magazine named him a New Yorker of the Year in 2017 for leading the repeal of New York's Cabaret Law—which had been used to target black-owned clubs, gay bars, and underground establishments since the Prohibition Era—and the establishment of the city's new Office of Nightlife. Whether through securing major investments and job creation in his historically underprivileged community or pushing to prevent employers from retaliating against workers by proposing a legal “right to disconnect,” Espinal has been a fierce advocate for workers, fighting to improve their opportunities and quality of life.

About Freelancers Union

Freelancers Union is the largest and fastest-growing organization representing the 57 million independent workers across the country. It gives its 500,000 members a voice through policy advocacy, benefits, online resources, and educational and community-building events in nearly two dozen cities. Since its founding, Freelancers Union has fought for and won protections for freelance workers, including the first-of-its kind Freelance Isn't Free Act in New York City, which gives freelancers unprecedented protection from nonpayment and underpayment. In 2018, Freelancers Union launched Freelancers Hub, a free coworking space and training and resource center for freelancers, with support from the NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. Learn more at www.freelancersunion.org.

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