Amid economic disaster for performers, SAG-AFTRA kicks out hundreds of members over unpaid dues

David Walsh
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The ongoing economic disaster for the overwhelming majority of film and television actors, members of SAG-AFTRA, once again made the headlines this week.

As of November 1, the union reinstated its regular dues enforcement and membership rules. The various regulations were suspended during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2023 Hollywood strike to provide some financial relief (or because the union had no ability to collect the dues, frankly, given the devastation).

According to standard SAG-AFTRA practice, membership is automatically terminated if a union member remains out of good standing for a period of 18 months due to the non-payment of dues or related administrative fees.

The union claims that since 2020,

> SAG-AFTRA has worked hard to support members through extraordinary challenges, however, we must return to our traditional and constitutionally-mandated membership dues billing practices. This will allow us to continue funding critical union services like residuals processing, contract negotiations, legal advocacy and member support services.

While SAG-AFTRA has not released an exact figure, affected performers and industry reports suggest that hundreds of members had their union standing scheduled for termination November 1.

One of those who made his painful situation public was 37-year-old Colton Little, a performer on the long-running soap opera *Days of Our Lives*. Little appeared in 32 episodes from 2023 to 2026. He indicated in a social media post that he was set to lose his union membership amid financial struggles.

Little's post explained:

> Get ready with me to get kicked out of SAG-AFTRA, the actor's union… If you're new here, I'm an actor, and I've been acting professionally for about 15 years. I've been a recurring character on a major TV show for the last four. I've done a handful of movies and co-star spots and guest star spots on other shows, and SAG is kicking out hundreds of members today because the union charges actors dues that are based on how much you earn acting. Right now I owe about two thousand dollars. And as a working class actor in LA after COVID and two strikes and now the imminent threat of AI replacing everybody's job. There are no auditions. There are no parts. There is nothing filming in LA. It's really bleak.

Little went on to reveal he had decided not to pay his dues and "to pull back" from acting and "this dream that I've poured so much into."

SAG-AFTRA charges "annual base dues," currently set at $246.14. In addition, members pay work dues, amounting to 1.575 percent of all individual earnings under a union contract.

In response to Little's Instagram post, SAG-AFTRA released a bland statement, which explained nothing and essentially promised that the union would continue to *do nothing* to fight the wretched conditions and the conglomerates that hold film and television production in a stranglehold:

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> Colton is expressing what many performers are feeling. The business has changed. The collaboration between artists, studios, casting, and representation that once defined this industry has become more transactional and member opportunities have diminished as a result.
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> SAG-AFTRA remains committed to protecting the ability of actors to make a life in this profession. Member leaders are working hard to meet the challenges ahead, and we welcome every member who wants to be part of that work while respecting the individual choices any artist makes in this climate.

A fighting statement…

Despite the fantasies generated about Hollywood, the reality for the vast majority of performers or would-be performers is very difficult.

According to various news reports, roughly 80 to 85 percent of SAG-AFTRA members make less than $26,500, the minimum threshold required to qualify for SAG-AFTRA health insurance.

Another report estimated that approximately 85 percent of union members earn under $16,000 a year or struggle to make a full-time living from performance work alone.

Statistics and reports indicate that for actors fortunate enough to work regularly the median salary is around $46,960.

Less than 1 percent of the SAG-AFTRA membership consistently earns over $100,000 a year entirely from acting roles.

Meanwhile, entertainment executives are swimming in cash. The *Hollywood Reporter* commented in May,

> Hollywood really is a larger-than-life version of corporate America… Across all U.S. industries, median CEO pay hit $29.4 million in 2025... But for top entertainment execs, that's on the low end, per *The Hollywood Reporter*'s annual look at the highest-paid media chiefs. Many of the moguls on our list made around $50 million. Or much more.
>
> Not only that, but the employee-to-CEO pay ratio is higher in entertainment. Across all industries, 341 employee salaries equal one CEO's take-home pay. That median is far exceeded at most of the major Hollywood companies tracked for this list (think 805-to-1 for former Disney chief Bob Iger).

Entertainment union officials are also cashing in, even as their members suffer from the "great contraction." The *Hollywood Reporter* revealed that in 2025

> SAG-AFTRA's [Duncan] Crabtree-Ireland again won the distinction of being Hollywood's top-grossing labor leader according to the LM-2s, with a published gross salary of $1,068,535. He was followed by the DGA's [Directors Guild's Russell] Hollander ($824,327), the WGA West's [Ellen] Stutzman ($767,957) and [IATSE international president Matthew] Loeb ($549,642).

Part of the propaganda generated by the various entertainment unions, at least until recently, was the assertion that the SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikes in 2023 were great victories. The present state of things has helped to reveal this, as the WSWS insisted at the time, as a giant lie. The contracts attained did nothing to protect jobs or incomes, instead they gave the studios and networks a free hand to impose the current brutal conditions.

Orange is the New Black actress Laverne Cox is one of the few who has let the cat out of the bag. In June, according to *USA Today,* she criticized

> SAG-AFTRA's 2023 agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which ended the 118-day strike. "I feel blessed to be a part of a union, and I'm very pro-union, but yeah that was a mess," Cox said, citing issues such as regulation of AI usage and residual payments for actors. "We got nothing that we wanted in that contract."



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