

ON THE MOVE



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ON THE MOVE

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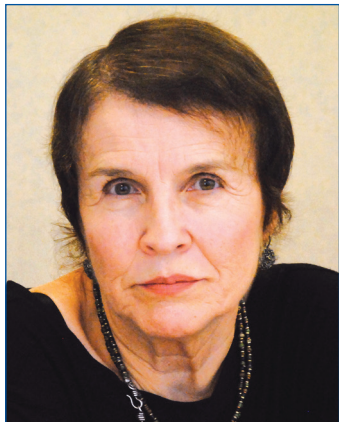
RETIREE CHAPTER 31 REPRESENTATIVE

Larry Brown

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Our work matters!

Making a difference every day



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE ARE DETERMINED TO KEEP UP THE FIGHT FOR HUMANE WORKING CONDITIONS

Earlier this year—January 4 to be precise—DCFS child protection investigator Deidre Silas was brutally stabbed to death while making a home visit to check on an at-risk child.

Her death came some four years after another DCFS investigator, Pam Knight, seeking to rescue an abused child, was stomped into a coma by the abusive father. She later succumbed to her injuries.

Both of these murders received coverage in the local press and a spurt of interest from local legislators, but there was little effort made to fully understand the challenges, or value, of the work DCFS employees do. Since then, reports of the child welfare system's failures have returned to the headlines and legislative hearings, but there has been virtually no mention of the countless children DCFS employees regularly save from death or grievous harm.

Time and again we see this same kind of indifference toward so much of the work that is done by public employees—work that is the foundation of our social order, work that maintains our communities, educates our children, aids those most in need, and, not infrequently, saves lives.

While corporations get kudos when they do little more than make a charitable donation and nonprofit organizations are singled out for media profiles and visits from politicians, public agencies—and the employees who keep them going—seldom receive more than a glancing nod. Yet these employees often must work under highly stressful, even dangerous, conditions and are commonly under-resourced for the tasks they are expected to fulfill.

Nothing has demonstrated this profound lack of appreciation more than events of the past three years. With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the demands on public employees increased exponentially. This global crisis truly and deeply required a public response—public health, public transit, public safety, public sanitation—the list could go on and on.

While others hunkered

down, public employees stepped up, meeting the unprecedented challenges that the pandemic presented. In Illinois state government, thousands of employees reported to their worksites every single day (and night) to care for vulnerable individuals with severe disabilities, to support ailing veterans, and to maintain order and security among incarcerated individuals.

Local government employees were out there on the job too—assuring trash pick-up, keeping county jails secure, conducting COVID testing and vaccination programs, and much more.

Public service workers of every kind answered the call. They worked tirelessly, often to the point of exhaustion, to meet the needs of their communities.

Through it all, there was little in the way of accolades for, even recognition of, the sacrifices made—the thousands who became sick with COVID, those who brought it home to family members, those who acutely felt the stress of masking and testing day in and day out.

Then just as the severity of the crisis began to abate and a semblance of normalcy returned, just as employees believed they would no longer have to put their families at risk, just as politicians were hailing the progress made in beating back the pandemic, another kind of crisis confronted those working in the public sector: a drastic shortage of workers.

While hiring as of late has proven difficult in every type of employment, data show that the public sector has been hardest hit, with widespread shortfalls.

This crisis is far less visible than COVID. In fact, political leaders often prefer to keep it invisible, unwilling to shake up convoluted and outmoded hiring systems, adjust salaries, or fix oppressive working conditions.

Yet those are precisely the kind of measures that are needed

to address the inhumane working conditions that the shortage is giving rise to.

Council 31 recently conducted a survey of AFSCME members who work on the frontlines in state of Illinois round-the-clock congregate settings—correctional facilities, psychiatric hospitals, developmental centers and vets' homes—and the results are deeply disturbing.

In order to maintain staffing levels needed to keep the individuals in their charge safe, employees are forced to work overtime again and again—not just an hour or two here and there, but double shifts, 16 hours straight, three or four times a week, frequently with little to no advance warning. Employees often don't get breaks or lunches; some report getting only four hours' sleep after working a double before having to head back to work. Exhaustion is their norm.

Family life suffers greatly under such conditions. Union members report missing activities and gatherings—Mothers' Day, Christmas, birthdays, children's sports. Tensions increase and arguments become more common. A number of staff wrote that the long hours and pressures of the job have led to divorce.

With such low staffing levels, assaults on employees by inmates or forensic patients have become far more common. Workers report broken noses, eye damage, concussions, and injuries to every part of the body.

In other words, these front-line employees are living under great pressure, facing great risks, and sacrificing a great deal. And yet, like so many others in the public service, their work is seldom acknowledged or appreciated by our elected officials, who give speech after speech patting themselves on the back for meeting far lesser challenges.

So let me say it clearly here. To all the public employees who keep our state and our communities strong: Thank you! We see what you do every day, we value the essential services you provide, and we are determined to keep up the fight to improve staffing levels and secure safer and more humane working conditions for all.



Members of the state bargaining committee met in full for the first time on Nov. 16-17 to consider more than 400 proposals sent in from local unions.

State bargaining committee gears up for negotiations

A FSCME members in state government are gearing up for contract negotiations for a new state of Illinois master contract, which covers some 35,000 state employees.

Council 31's state bargaining committee, elected by union members in each local union, is one of the largest and most robust bargaining committees of any union in the country. All state locals are represented on the committee in comparison to their size, resulting in a body that is more than 200 members strong.

"We have a lot of very committed, experienced activists on this committee," said Council 31 Regional Director Eddie Caumiant. "There's a diverse range of employee classifications represented, and everyone is bringing their passion and knowledge to the table. It's very exciting."

Members on the bargaining team do not take the responsibility lightly. When they join the bargaining committee, they go through a training program to equip them with the knowledge and skills they'll need at the negotiating table.

It takes a special kind of dedication to join the state bargaining committee. The meetings can be long and will likely go on for months. Committee members sacrifice time spent with their family and friends.

"I'm a first-time empty nester. My son has gone to college, and that affords me the

freedom to give my all to this committee," said Jennifer Howard, president of Local 2081 and an administrative staffer in the Department of Children and Family Services. "I want to be there where it all goes down. Those long nights I've heard about, bargaining over language—it excites me."

For Howard, serving on the committee will allow her to better serve the needs of her members.

"The more you know about the contract, the more you can do for your members," she said.

Rauner years cast long shadow

Veterans of state employment will remember former Gov. Bruce Rauner's disrespect and vilification of public employees and their unions. Rauner's enduring legacy will be his unwillingness to bargain with AFSCME members as he dragged out a contract fight for most of his 4-year term.

The years-long contract fight reached a boiling point when 81% of eligible AFSCME members in state government voted to authorize a strike for the first time in history. Due to a court order stymying Rauner's game plan, state employees

never ended up going out on strike, but the threat loomed large.

Angela Fry, a retired nurse practitioner II and former member of Local 29 at Shapiro Developmental Center, was on the bargaining committee at that time. She remembers those years with a shudder.

"It felt like we were at war," Fry said. "When Rauner came to the table, they just put up walls against everything we asked for. They weren't bargaining in good faith; they would come to the table with these pathetic proposals and we did everything we could to push back on them."

AFSCME members relied on grassroots activism to fight back—and took that fight to

refused to sign a balanced budget for 793 days, cratering the state's credit rating and piling up unpaid bills that totaled billions of dollars.

After the budget crisis was over, there was optimism about the health of the state budget—until the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020. States governments across the United States were on shaky fiscal ground as the pandemic took its toll on tax revenue streams, but six major Congressional stimulus packages helped shore up budgets.

With the combination of federal stimulus dollars and inflation at a 40-year high, total state revenue has consistently exceeded expectations. In 2022, total revenue reached


employees. We're still going to have to demand what we deserve like we do at every bargaining table."

There's another reason that the state's finances are exceeding expectations: the staffing crisis. With so many vacant positions in state government, the state's payroll is smaller than it has budgeted for.

Bargaining gets underway in January

Proposals from local unions were received in mid-October and are being considered by the committee before it dives into bargaining in January.

One key issue in bargaining will be safety and staffing levels at state agencies, particularly at 24/7 facilities. Staffing levels at state agencies have nosedived since the beginning of the pandemic, and staff assaults and injuries are on the rise everywhere. There are almost 7,000 funded vacancies across all departments of state government.

"Our committee members are ready to get to work," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch, "but they will need the active and unified grassroots support of union members from one end of this state to the other to make sure that we continue to build on past progress and employees once again can secure the wage increases, benefit enhancements and expanded job rights they deserve." 

"We have a lot of very committed, experienced activists on this committee."

the electoral arena in 2018, helping to defeat Rauner at the ballot box. That victory changed everything, as the bargaining committee was then able to negotiate a fair contract with the new administration of JB Pritzker.

State's finances improving

The stability of the state's finances has improved significantly since the current contract was negotiated. During Rauner's term, he

\$50.3 billion. But it's not expected to stay there—as the Federal Reserve tries to tame inflation and federal COVID dollars run dry, revenue could creep downward in coming years.

"With this revenue, there are a lot of competing interests who want to be prioritized for funding," said Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits Martha Merrill. "Just because the state is in a more stable position doesn't mean that it wants to spend more money on

Chicago members take action to speed up pace of negotiations



Members of city of Chicago locals flash signed pledge cards outside the office of Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

More than 4,000 members of the city of Chicago bargaining units have been fighting for a fair contract since the end of June as the city has been slow-walking contract negotiations.

AFSCME members in city government are engineers, health care workers, librarians and clerical workers, among many other job classifications.

Bargaining got underway with the administration of Mayor Lori Lightfoot last spring. Union members have kept their foot on the gas in their fight for a fair contract and have engaged in a series of actions with the hope of advancing their goals at the bargaining table.

Members distributed, signed and collected thousands of cards pledging that they are standing together in their fight for a fair contract.

On Oct. 12, with boxes full of the pledge cards in tow, dozens of AFSCME local leaders made their way to City Hall's fifth floor, home to the office of Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

The cards were delivered personally to Lightfoot outside her office, where Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman explained that city workers are demanding an end to the delay in negotiating a fair contract.

"All of these people worked through the whole pandemic

and are committed to the city, and committed to making sure this city works," Newman told the mayor. "I know you respect city employees, and we're asking for a demonstration of that respect: We want a contract quickly."

The mayor responded by expressing her gratitude to city workers and said her desire was not to draw out negotiations for years on end.

"Obviously, the pace is not to your liking. I hear you," Lightfoot told the AFSCME leaders. But the mayor gave no indication that the pace of negotiations would quicken any time soon.

The delivery of thousands of signed pledge cards sent a message, but city workers knew they had to turn the pressure up. On Oct. 27, hundreds of AFSCME members from all across Chicago came together to picket and call for a fair contract.

"Everybody was pumped up and excited," said Denise Williams, president of Local 1669, which represents workers in the Department of Human Services. "A lot of people at my

worksite have been waiting for something like this. They were so excited about it because they wanted to get the message across that we deserve a fair contract."


The massive display of solidarity at the Day of Action surely sent a message that was received loud and clear by city managers. The horns of passing cars blared in support for the picketing workers, and news media splashed coverage of the

action across the city's papers and airwaves.

The bargaining committee said that management's negotiators appeared to be taking union proposals much more seriously following the Day of Action, but the city has yet to respond on a number of key issues, including wages and benefits.

"We're going to continue to fight until we get what we deserve," Williams said. "We

are going to continue to negotiate, but they need to come to the table with some fair and reasonable compromises."

The AFSCME bargaining team has secured one big win: A tentative agreement for a paid parental leave policy that gives both parents 12 weeks of paid time off following the birth, adoption or fostering of a child. The previous policy only gave between four and six weeks of paid time off. 



Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman speaks with Mayor Lightfoot after delivering pledge cards.

Grievance process at work

The grievance process is one of the best tools in a local union's toolbox. For the Rockford school bus drivers of AFSCME Local 1275 and Lake County Circuit Clerk employees of Local 3182, winning grievances meant recovering tens of thousands of dollars in back pay and improperly withheld bonuses.

Attendance bonus paid to 104 Local 1275 members

AFSCME members who drive school buses for Rockford Public Schools District 205 worked hard to get a \$150 attendance bonus in their last contract. When it wasn't paid out to 104 drivers who qualified, Local 1275 President Catina Barnett quickly filed a grievance.

"There's nothing like going to work every week, doing what you're supposed to do, and being denied what you're owed under the contract that you worked for," Barnett said. "I owe it to the members to get them what they deserve, what they are owed."

The contract said that as long as workers showed up for the hours they are required to work in a given

week, they should receive the bonus. Management tried arguing that a mandatory six-hour meeting that took place before the school year began didn't constitute working hours, so the attendance bonus shouldn't be paid to employees who came to the meeting—even though they were on the clock.

The union prevailed, winning the grievance that put a total of more than \$17,000 into the pockets of some 100 members.

Back pay for long-time Lake County workers


Sandra Lucio has worked at the Lake County Clerk of the Circuit Court for 27 years, so when her union negotiated raises in its most recent contract, she was happy to

know that no employee would be "topped out" and the negotiated raises would apply to everyone.

But when she got her first pay stub after the new contract went into effect, she noticed the numbers didn't add up to what the contract spelled out.

Then Lucio learned that she wasn't the only one whose paycheck was short. After the

raises from their new contract went into effect, Lucio had been mistakenly topped out in the payroll system. The union filed a grievance that won nearly \$17,000 in back wages for six long-time clerk's office employees.

"It was a relief," Lucio said. "We work hard for our money, and we deserve to get paid what we're owed." 

Newberry Library workers win with AFSCME

The wave of cultural workers coming together to form new unions with AFSCME in libraries and museums is rolling on: In a National Labor Relations Board union election held on Nov. 1, employees of Chicago's Newberry Library voted to form Newberry Workers United/AFSCME.

More than 75% of votes cast were "Yes" for the union.

The Newberry is an independent research library that opened in 1887 and is home to collections on genealogy, printing and medieval studies. It contains one of the largest collections of postcards anywhere in the world. Newberry Workers United/AFSCME will represent some 60 employees including conservators, librarians, library assistants, program coordinators and program assistants, among others.

In a public letter released in August, the Newberry employees' organizing committee said that workers want better wages and benefits, safer working conditions and predictable schedules.

"We are proud to join workers at cultural institutions across the country who have

organized and inspired us to use our collective power to improve our workplace," they wrote.

Analú López, a librarian in the Newberry's indigenous studies collection, has worked at the library full-time for more than five years. She said the idea to form a union came after workers started an informal staff program they called Coffee Buddies, where workers would have a chance to meet and chat with colleagues they might otherwise not get to build relationships with.


Coffee Buddies ultimately led to workers opening up about their salaries, revealing inconsistencies and inequity in how they were paid. Out of those conversations the idea to form Newberry Workers United was born.

"Some people think, if we're not happy, we should

just go somewhere else," López said. "That's not it—we all love the institution, I love my colleagues, I love the collections. It's not a matter of not liking my job. I want this to be my career. But we are overworked, underpaid and understaffed."

What followed was months of one-on-one conversations with colleagues, answering questions and gauging their interest. It was a long, arduous process, but one that ultimately paid off. When the last vote was counted and their colleagues had made their voices

heard, López was ecstatic, but her mind immediately went to what's next.

"The election is just the first step in a long process we'll be going through," she said. "I'm excited, happy and nervous for what's next all at the same time." 



Newberry Workers United/AFSCME will represent some 60 employees of the library.

Voters approve Workers' Rights Amendment

On Nov. 8, Illinois made history, becoming the most pro-worker, pro-union state in the country when voters approved the Workers' Rights Amendment to the state constitution. Drawing 2.14 million yes votes—58% of those voting on the question and 53% of all those casting ballots—the measure protects every worker's right to collective bargaining and ensures that no politician could take that right away.

It's a stark contrast to recent assaults on workers' rights that saw some states strip public employees of their bargaining rights and some enact so-called "right-to-work" laws that hamper union growth in the private sector. Illinois came frighteningly close to becoming one such state during the governorship of Bruce Rauner.

This year, AFSCME members in all corners of Illinois reached out to educate their co-workers, family and friends on the importance of voting yes on the amendment.

Eric Lundt is a senior special agent with the Illinois Gaming Board and the PEOPLE chair of AFSCME Local 2467.

He volunteered his weekends to knock on doors not just to do his part to pass the amendment, but also out of a sense of duty to union members of the past.

"There's an obligation for every union member to participate in something as monumental as the Workers' Rights Amendment," Lundt said. "There are a lot of people decades ago that have endured bodily harm—even death—fighting for these fundamental rights that we are so privileged to have today. I'm just happy I could be a part of it and carry on what our brothers and sisters have done in the past."

Jack Matthews, president of AFSCME Local 1964,



AFSCME members from all across Illinois volunteered to help pass the Workers' Rights Amendment.


which represents state workers in Springfield, made a point of touting the Workers' Rights Amendment at every opportunity.

"Every time we had members together it was a topic of conversation," Matthews said. "We were promoting it through our communications options

and membership meetings, and we discussed it at every new member orientation."

Matthews said his local found success when they tied the importance of the Workers' Rights Amendment to the pension protection clause in the state constitution.

"We communicated to our

local was this was equivalent to the pension protection clause in the constitution—it's just as important," he said. "Given the way politicians have attacked and will continue to attack our pensions, now our rights to collective bargaining will be protected in the same way our pensions are." 

Red Wave? Blue Wave? No – a Green Wave

AFSCME-backed candidates win big

On Election Day, workers and retirees won big in Illinois—with a Green AFSCME Wave cresting from Cairo to Chicago, Anna to Rock Island and everywhere in between. Union-backed candidates and causes won in nearly every state and federal race, and in a majority of county contests, too.

When the post-election dust settled, 94% of AFSCME-recommended candidates had won their elections.

Illinoisans elected pro-worker, pro-union candidates from Congress to county boards. Some of AFSCME's very own won their elections, including former longtime AFSCME local president Gregg

Johnson, who was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, and AFSCME Retirees member Doris Turner, who was returned to the Illinois Senate.

One of the biggest victories of the election was securing a majority on the Illinois Supreme Court prepared to protect public employee pensions. Mary Kay O'Brien and

Elizabeth Rochford defeated candidates backed by big-money forces determined to undermine the constitution's pension protection clause.

"The Supreme Court is an incredibly important body to all Illinoisans, but it has been particularly important to AFSCME members," said Joanna Webb-Gauvin, Council 31 director of political and legislative affairs. "It has weighed in several times on issues like pension protection and wages in the last decade. Had we not won at least one of those races, there would have been some uncertain times ahead for public-sector workers."

AFSCME members from all corners of the state volunteered to knock on doors or make phone calls and send

texts. Webb-Gauvin said this type of grassroots activism is still by far the most effective form of political outreach.

"Even with all the new digital tools out there, there's overwhelming evidence that shows there is nothing more


"It hasn't always been easy, but now I feel we have a seat at the table."

effective in persuading someone to support something like knocking on their door and having a conversation," Webb-Gauvin said. "It demonstrates the candidate or issue has enough support that someone is going to volunteer their time

to knock on their door on a Saturday afternoon."

Local PEOPLE committees also met with candidates to make recommendations in the races that were closest to home. In DuPage County, AFSCME members made recommendations for the first time ever, and they proved fruitful: AFSCME-backed state legislator Deb Conroy won for chair of the county board, as did six of the seven board candidates the union recommended.

"We are the ones who work through the pandemic. We work nights, weekends and holidays through staffing shortages and adverse conditions," said Orlando Venecia, a nurse at the DuPage County Jail and member of a recently organized union which hasn't yet been assigned a local number. "Instead of being a line item on a budget, we wanted to have a say in these races."

Venecia says it feels good knowing that union members made a difference. 

Rushville exposure incident underscores need for mail safety

A security therapy aide (STA) at the state of Illinois' Rushville Treatment and Detention Center nearly died in October after coming into contact with an unknown substance sent to the facility by mail. She was ultimately saved after first responders gave her three doses of Narcan.

Rushville houses individuals convicted of certain sexual offenses who remain in state custody after they have served their prison sentences. The individuals at Rushville are not considered prisoners and are entitled to more freedoms than inmates in a state correctional facility are. This means that security staff are not allowed to open and screen mail sent to Rushville's population.

In this case, an individual in custody opened a letter to find he was sent photographs, which are forbidden. When he came to show the STA what was inside, she dumped the photos out and a powdery substance fell out, which was then likely breathed

in by the STA, who then passed out.

AFSCME Local 3416 President Jason Chenoweth said the situation could have been lethal if the STA didn't have someone by her side.

"Most of the time we're so short staffed, we only have one person to pass out the mail," Chenoweth said. "Luckily there was another employee with her who could call for help. If he wasn't there, she could have died."

While paramedics were en route, the STA went into cardiac arrest. A nurse gave her a dose of Narcan, a medication that treats opioid overdoses. She received Narcan

twice more on the way to the hospital.

Chenoweth said the STA's physical condition has improved, but she has experienced lasting trauma from the incident.

The intended target of the attack is unknown. Illinois State Police are conducting an investigation into the matter, including performing tests to determine what the powder was.

The incident at Rushville underscores the necessity to have Narcan at facilities where people in custody are being sent mail.

Just a few miles down the road from Rushville at Western Correctional Center, correctional officers are confronting the same problem. According to AFSCME Local 3567 President Keith Powell, Western started experiencing issues with drugs and other unknown substances sent through the mail, with at least five employees sent to the hospital. In all five instances, they were treated with Narcan.


Most recently, a correctional officer at Western was opening mail when he started to feel dizzy and his blood pressure

skyrocketed. He was given two doses of Narcan on the way to the hospital.

"He's physically fit. He's a good officer, and he nearly succumbed to this," Powell said. "His wife was expecting. He has four kids. It was really scary. It's happened multiple times and we've pushed for Narcan in all the cell houses and in any areas that review mail."

Besides having Narcan readily available, Powell says there are a number of measures that state facilities could implement to reduce the risks of exposure to workers. One is installing body scanners to help prevent contraband from being smuggled into facilities.

Another is employing a system, such as one that Iowa's corrections department recently introduced, that scans and produces digital copies of mail for inmates, so neither inmates nor correctional officers ever actually physically touch the contents of the mail.

"I don't know why the state of Illinois is on the cutting edge of everything else except when it comes to keeping us safe," Powell said. 



Narcan Saves Lives

Narcan is a nasal spray or injection that quickly and effectively treats suspected opioid overdoses. It can quickly restore normal breathing to a person if their breathing has slowed or stopped because of an opioid overdose. At all facilities where drugs could be present or smuggled in, it's critical that Narcan be readily available. It can be the difference between life and death.

Randolph County voters back measure to keep care center open

Randolph County residents delivered an overwhelming vote to keep the community's nursing home in public hands. A referendum to sell an unused portion of the nursing home to a private company passed with 67% of the vote.

In recent years, the nursing home's population has fallen from nearly 120 residents to 49. The building is more than 70 years old and in need of serious repairs and maintenance to keep it up to code. The solution local officials devised was to rent the unused portion of the home to a private company for use as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, which would bring in enough money to prevent the closure or sale of the nursing home.

Members of AFSCME Local 2402, which represents the employees at the home,

engaged in a robust campaign to educate voters in their community. Julie Clutts, a certified nurse assistant and executive board member of the local, said they left no stone unturned, papering the community with flyers and sending a barrage of emotionally resonant social media posts.

"I told everyone I ever saw," Clutts said. "We went door to door with flyers. We hung them at post offices. We were heavy on social media, doing interviews with the residents, staff and families as to why they were voting yes."


If the referendum failed, the county would have likely been forced to close the home, putting dozens of AFSCME members out of work and forcing almost 50 elderly residents of the home to relocate, in many cases to nursing homes that would be more

than an hour away.

Clutts said the excitement watching the "yes" votes roll in on Election Day was palpable.

"They made the announcement to the residents in the dining hall that it passed, and

there were just cheers all across the room," Clutts said.

Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Lynch led the effort to pass the ballot initiative, with help from retired Staff Representative Steve Joiner. 



Randolph County Care Center workers prepare to hit the streets to educate neighbors on the referendum.

AFSCME BOOTS ON THE GROUND MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Nabeela Syed, state Rep.-elect, 51st District

I feel incredibly grateful to have had AFSCME's support in our election! AFSCME members came out to knock on doors for our campaign and supported us on Election Day at the polling places, and in a race as difficult as our's, that is what makes the difference. I am looking forward to working together and continuing to expand the progress Illinois has made to support working families in our state. Thank you so much!



State Sen. Doris Turner, 48th District

My election was touted as the number one Senate race in the state of Illinois, and it lived up to the hype. As an AFSCME retiree I cannot tell you how ecstatic I was to have my union brothers and sisters by my side throughout this campaign. When things seemed almost insurmountable, and I walked into the campaign office and saw AFSCME volunteers making phone calls and ready to knock on doors on my behalf, it not only put a smile on my face but let me know in my heart—victory was on the way! This support made a difference, and I will forever be grateful!



Chris Scrol, Winnebago County Board, District 15

It meant a lot to me to have AFSCME's support in my run for county board. With their ground game, AFSCME volunteers bring an unrivaled level of grit and determination. Seeing the men and women who do the work for our city and county out hitting doors was inspiring and I saw the difference it made at the polls! Having AFSCME boots on the ground was a key difference maker.



Mary Beth Canty, state Rep.-elect, 54th District

Since its inception, AFSCME has been a foundation of support for working families. "Public needs never quit, and neither does AFSCME" couldn't have been better exemplified than by the team of support you provided in my campaign to help bring in this win, and I, too, promise I will never quit fighting for working families in Illinois. I can't thank the AFSCME team enough for your help during the 2022 season, and I hope to live up to what you expect from me in return: to be a champion in Springfield for the voices in this district. I have a tremendous amount to learn, and I am confident that together we will be able to do great work for the people of the 54th and Illinois in general.



Deb Conroy, Chair-elect, DuPage County Board

Receiving the early and dedicated support from AFSCME and their volunteers was invaluable. From making phone calls and knocking on doors, I was proud to have the backing of working families. The grassroots support of the campaign is what edged out my opponent and because of that we were able to make history as the first woman elected to be DuPage County Board Chair. As Chair I will continue to fight for these families and support our local labor unions.



**AFSCME
members
getting out the
vote**



Upward Mobility Program enrollment continues to rise

More and more AFSCME members in state government are taking advantage of the Upward Mobility Program (UMP). Since 2017, the number of state workers who have enrolled in UMP has increased by 67%, with almost 5,500 people enrolled in the program on average throughout 2021.

UMP is a career mobility program established pursuant to the AFSCME collective bargaining agreement for state employees. It gives workers an opportunity to advance to more challenging, higher-paying positions through individual career counseling, proficiency exams and education and training programs in data processing, office services, accounting, human services, criminal justice, social work and medical fields.

Before UMP, state employees did not have rights to jobs in other bargaining units, and state-funded education and career advancement services were scarce. Since its inception, UMP has helped over 11,000 state employees earn promotions.

Thousands more have taken exams and classes to advance their careers. All state

employees covered by the master contract who are interested in going back to school or seeking promotional opportunities can take advantage of this program.

Brad Musgrave is a corrections assessment specialist at Lawrence Correctional Center in Local 3600. He began working for the state in 2014 when he joined the Department of Human Services, but he was excited at the different opportunities that he could apply for through UMP. In 2016, he made the decision to pursue the title of corrections assessment specialist.

Musgrave was qualified for the job, but it's difficult to jump between state departments. One of the main reasons UMP exists is to make it easier for workers to move between agencies.

"I think it's very important to educate yourself on

the opportunities that UMP can provide if you're a state employee looking for a new challenge," Musgrave said. "There's opportunity for advancement when you complete the application and reach out and gain insight from other people."

Musgrave said he sought guidance from Council 31 UMP Coordinator Chris Goodman, who was able to help shepherd him through the application process and explain how the program works.

Mark Rosenkoetter, a correctional officer at Graham Correctional Center, was afforded time to take off to continue his education at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville to get his master's degree in social work through a similar program negotiated in the state master contract.

"I'm actually able to use my work experience to enhance my education," Rosenkoetter said. "My experiences in state employment have enhanced my education because I'm able to apply the theoretical stuff we learn in class to real-life experiences I've had on the job."

"I have the opportunity now to go back to a facility where I have ground-level experience and understand how everything works," he said. "Other people who would have



Mark Rosenkoetter took advantage of an educational leave provision in the state contract to study at SIU-Edwardsville.

come into the job fresh would have had a steeper learning curve and wouldn't be able to apply policies in the same way. My years in state service have been a benefit to my education, not a hinderance."

Last year, UMP rolled out

continuous enrollment, meaning the online registration system is now accessible 24/7.

Demand for the program is high. To explore career advancement opportunities through UMP, visit cms.illinois.gov/ump.

IPI sinks ever lower in failed attempt to defeat WRA

By now, many AFSCME members are familiar with the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI), an anti-union think tank that has consistently attacked public workers. But in its failed campaign to defeat the Workers' Rights Amendment, the IPI sunk to new, unimaginable lows.

It was expected that the IPI would vehemently oppose the Workers' Rights Amendment, just as they have opposed nearly every other measure that would make workers' lives better. The wealthy donors backing the organization want to wipe out unions—and the gains that union members have made—so they can hoard more and more wealth for themselves.

The IPI's disinformation factory started with the lie that if the Workers' Rights Amendment passed, then property taxes would go up by thousands of dollars. An alarming statistic—but it was entirely fictional.

Repeated fact checks by the media found no truth to these claims about property taxes. When the IPI was asked where that number came from, they all but admitted that they just

made it up.

But the IPI's lies took a much more sinister turn in the waning days of the election as it became clear that they were failing to turn the tide of support for the measure. In their final moments of desperation to defeat the amendment, they made the decision to sink lower than they have ever gone before.

The IPI began to spread repulsive, nonsensical lies about Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) workers. They claimed that if the amendment passed, these employees would advocate for getting rid of background checks for investigators so the administration could hire sex offenders.

This grotesque fabrication was utterly disrespectful to DCFS workers who routinely put themselves in harm's way to

save children from abuse.

David Morris, a social service program planner at DCFS and president of Local 805 which represents DCFS workers, had just one word to describe

"Lies like this are what we've come to expect from groups like them. It's what they do."

the claim: "Stupid."

"It just doesn't even make sense," Morris said. "We're out to protect children, why would we ever advocate for something like that? But lies like this are what we've come to expect from groups like them. It's what they do."

DCFS workers have been unfairly maligned for years. Morris said most workers have learned how to cope with having

a target on their back from groups like the IPI, but the outrageousness of this campaign was shocking even to them.

"It's unfortunate that the DCFS workforce has become fairly accustomed to being attacked and impugned," he continued. "But a lot of us were still really shocked that they went there. We were like, 'Really? You're going to go this low?'"

The depth of the lies the IPI was willing to tell could ultimately damage their credibility with the public.

"The public didn't believe it," he said. "They saw that these claims just didn't make any sense."

The IPI's lies ultimately proved too repulsive to voters. Unions focused on educating voters on the positive aspects of the amendment—stronger workplace rights, better wages, improved safety on the job—while the IPI chose to sling mud.

Since the WRA passed, the IPI has been unusually silent—but no doubt they will strike again. We'll be at the ready.

Staffing crisis brings safety issues and punishing overtime

As the staffing crisis continues, state workers have been faced with unprecedented upticks in violent assaults and punishing amounts of overtime, particularly at 24/7 facilities.

Adequate staffing levels are key to improving working conditions. Council 31 has proposed a number of changes that would speed up the hiring process and help attract new employees to state service. But very few of those recommendations have been acted upon.

As AFSCME members do their best to weather the storm, it's important to remember the human toll that the staffing crisis leaves in its wake. Here are just a few examples of the harm that is being done.

Illinois Department of Corrections

PONTIAC CORRECTIONAL CENTER

When fully staffed, Pontiac Correctional Center should have 790 correctional officers. Today the facility only has 345.

In 2022 alone, there have been 127 assaults on staff at Pontiac. The assaults range from being spit on all the way to stabbings.

In one unit, there's supposed to be 24 officers every

day. But with the staffing shortages, they only have 12. After accounting for fixed posts like suicide watch, there are only four officers left to man the other posts. Those four officers are then left to do the work of what, under normal staffing conditions, would be done by 16 officers.

"Are there more serious incidents nowadays? Yes," William Lee, AFSCME Local 494 president, said. "When someone in the gallery gets tackled or punched by an inmate, you have maybe three people responding. At one time, we would have had ten people in there in an instant."

DANVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Danville Correctional Center used to go months without any serious incidents. Now they report experiencing at least 10 inmate-on-inmate fights per month. They have at least one Code 1 call—the call that goes out when a staff member is in distress—per month, according to Nick Pryor, president of Local 2052 at the facility.

Danville is currently short nearly 65 correctional officers.

"When incidents happen, we don't have the staff to respond," Pryor said. "On my shift, if there was a staff in distress call when we are running feeding line operations, there would be literally no one available to respond to it. We have people stuck at their posts, sometimes escorting 30-50 inmates at a time, and they can't just leave them to respond to a call. It puts us

Batterton. People come to work fatigued, putting them at risk.

"You can't function at 100% when you do 40 hours overtime a week, no matter what anybody says," Batterton said.

Workers at Quincy worry about the level of care they are able to provide to the residents with so few staff available.

"We bring that stress home with us at night," Batterton

with hygiene or even to feed themselves.

Under adequate staffing conditions, there would be two to three frontline staff—mental health technicians—serving each of Kiley's group homes. Now, a number of homes only have one.

"That puts a lot of people in danger," said Cheryl Graham, president of AFSCME Local 785, which represents workers there. "If an individual chokes, there's only one staff person there to respond—and that's not sufficient."

Graham said one trainee was mandated to work four 16-hour shifts in a week. She reports that some workers have to take sick days because they are physically unable to come to work after repeatedly working crushingly long hours.

"When you have to make the choice between coming into work and caring for these people or staying home to prioritize your health, that's a heartbreaking choice," Graham said.

Department of Children and Family Services

Two of the most shocking incidents of violence in recent memory occurred in the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Two investigators, Deidre Silas and Pamela Knight, were murdered on the job within years of each other. Following these tragic events, DCFS leadership touted a renewed focus on worker safety, but workers say progress has been slow.

AFSCME members are fighting to achieve staffing levels sufficient to allow them to make home visits in pairs. DCFS investigators routinely enter situations with a high potential for conflict completely alone.

"We should be able to go out in pairs so that workers feel safe," said Arnold Black, president of Local 2971, which represents DCFS workers. "It's been months since Deidre died and years since Pam was killed. Leadership says it's urgent, but they don't act like it."

A report from the state Auditor General found that 21% of positions in DCFS's operations division are vacant. As caseloads continue to increase, workers are being forced to cover regions they are totally unfamiliar with to make up for the lack of staff.

When fully staffed, Pontiac Correctional Center should have 790 correctional officers. Today the facility only has 345.

in a dangerous situation, but it also puts the inmates in danger."

Department of Veterans' Affairs

At the Quincy Veterans' Home, there are currently 40 certified nursing assistant positions vacant, along with an additional 15 LPN vacancies. To take care of some 300 ailing veterans and spouses who reside at Quincy, workers say they need those positions filled—quickly.

Employees have been subjected to punishing hours of overtime, sometimes as much as an additional 40 hours per week, according to AFSCME Local 1787 President David

said. "You go home knowing you did the best you can, but you still worry."

Batterton urged Central Management Services to find solutions to the hiring problems and called for an end to forced overtime.

"Even though we love our vets and want to take care of them as best we can, we all have families that we want to see," he said. "It just can't go on like this."

Department of Human Services

Kiley Developmental Center is a DHS residential facility for people with developmental disabilities. Many of the clients there rely on staff for help

Keeping the pressure on

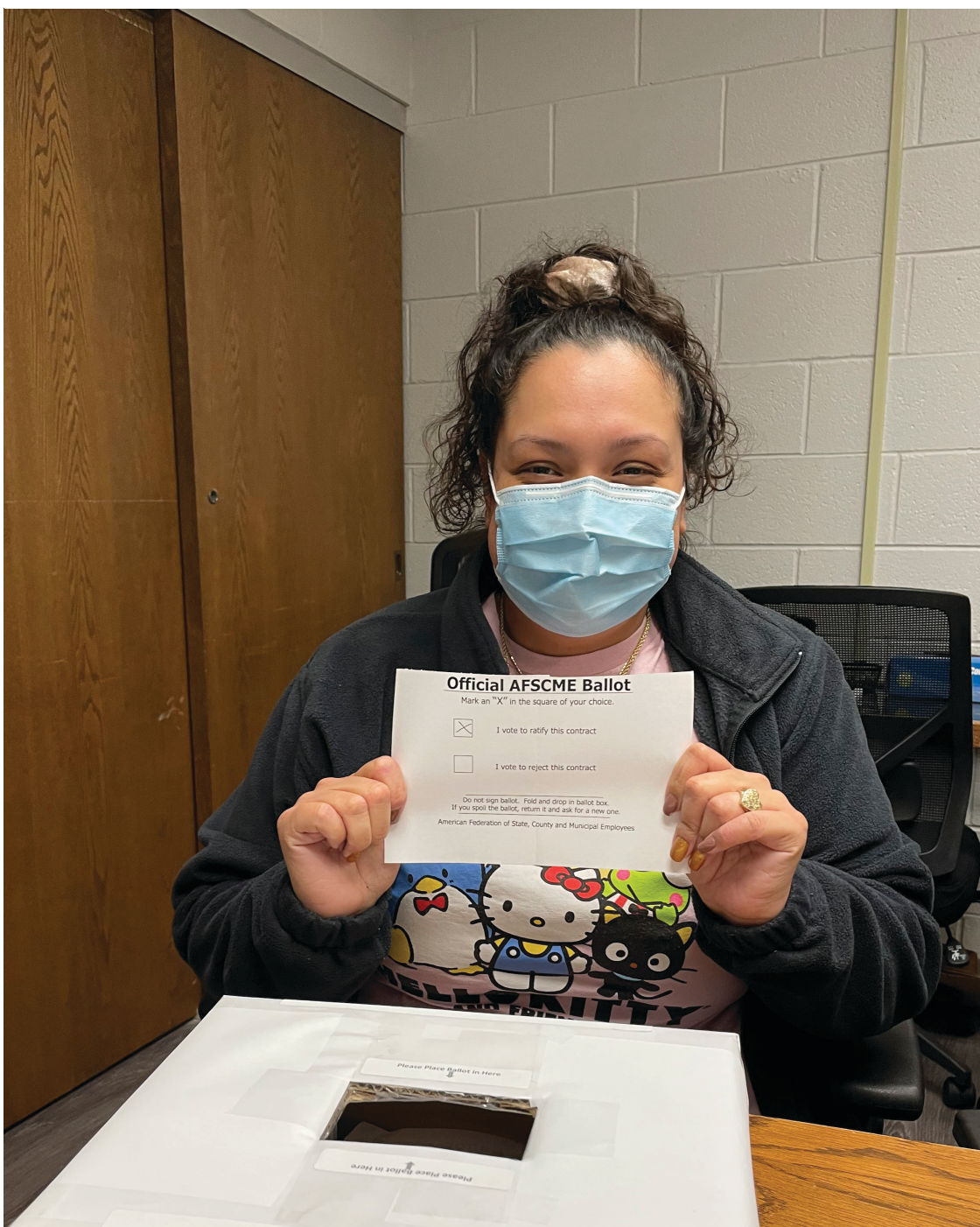
AFSCME members have been holding joint pickets with their colleagues in the Illinois Nurses Association, at Madden Mental Health Center in Hines on Oct. 26 (below) and at McFarland Mental Health Center in Springfield on Nov. 16, as they continue to call attention to the safety risks they face as a result of staff shortages.



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Members of Local 2515-1 ratify their new contract, which includes wage increases across the board and improvements to paid time off policies.



Contract gains in Rockford spur enthusiasm

A NEW CONTRACT negotiated by AFSCME Local 2515-1, which represents staff at Milestone Developmental Center in Rockford, made significant gains for the frontline caregivers and maintenance employees who make up the local's membership.

Milestone originally wanted to roll over the local's previous contract, but the bargaining team kept pushing. They knew they deserved more.

The decision not to roll over the contract proved fruitful. The union won more personal days, more bereavement days, doubled their weekend differential pay, won even more pay for workers whose shifts fall on a holiday on a weekend and secured wage increases across the board.

"Employees can readily see what having a union has done for them," said Scott Hilger, president of Local 2515-1.

One of the things Hilger is most proud of is the improvement on language for bereavement days, which now includes time off after the death of a step-parent or step-sibling. The idea to ask for the change came from one of his members.

"When she saw that what she proposed actually had become real, she was moved to tears," he said. "It's so nice to show everyone the positive work that has been done for them by the union."

The Local 2515-1 bargaining team included Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner, Hilger, Vice President LaToya Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer Donna Nelson, Recording Secretary Jessie Barnes Harris, Lashay Pinkey, Ruth Brinson and Regina Williams.

DuPage Probation makes big improvement on wages

MEMBERS OF LOCAL 3328 IN DuPage County Probation went into bargaining for their most recent contract knowing that they were going to make wages a key focus. Cost of living is up, and like governments everywhere, the county was bleeding talented people who were leaving for other higher-paying jobs.

"Like most places, we were having trouble keeping people employed," said local president Shannon Heatley, a senior probation officer. "We knew our starting salary wasn't competitive anymore with surrounding counties. We are a well-known, well-respected probation department in the state, but our starting salary was still so low that we couldn't retain people."

But what they ultimately won went far beyond just a cost-of-living increase and bump in starting salary. The smallest increase for each employee was \$7,000, and the average across all members of the bargaining unit was 16% in the first year and 25% over the three-year life of the contract.

"Some of the new people coming in, I got to tell them they get a \$7,000 raise in December," Heatley said. "They were besides themselves with excitement. We've had people almost in tears about the increase. They were relieved. They wanted to stay in this job, and this increase goes a long way."

On top of the wages, they won improved language on paid time off and five new personal days. They also got

the county to agree to reimburse workers for fees necessary to obtain special licenses that are required for certain positions.

Another win was improving language around safety. As probation officers, they work in unsafe situations out in the community. The new contract solidifies the county's responsibility to make sure everyone who works in the community has been fitted for a bullet-proof vest and is trained on a two-way radio.

Heatley said one of her goals as president has been to work more collaboratively with management. She says her efforts paid off.

"I wanted bargaining to be less adversarial, and I think it

Logan Co. Health Dept. wins healthy contract

THEY BATTLED THROUGH A pandemic at their walk-in immunization clinic. Their health inspectors steadfastly made sure public health guidelines were followed throughout the county. All across the board, members of Local 1277 in the Logan County Health Department made sure that the public health needs of their commu-

Local 1277 President Dana Oltmanns has worked at the Logan County Health Department for 37 years and was one of the founding members of her union almost 20 years ago. She's worked on contracts that have moved like molasses. This time around, they had a management team that was willing to engage with their union.

"It just makes the employees feel more respected by the administration and the Board of Health when they're willing to not drag this out over a long period of time," Oltmanns said.

President Cindy Harrelson and former President Lewis Allison.

Villa Park workers forge ahead

LOCAL 964 REPRESENTS VILLA Park workers who maintain streets, parks, and water supply, as well as office staff. Their latest contract gives them wage increases, improved vacation time and better recognition of longevity.

"What came out of it was more growth for everybody," said Local 964 President Eric Landsgrebe.

The contract gives everybody in the bargaining unit a

One of their strategies for improving retention was making sure new employees got five vacation days after 60 days of continuous employment, rather than having to wait a full year before accruing any vacation.

"Life happens, sometimes you need a vacation day, whether you're new or old," Landsgrebe said.

The contract also provides for the formation of the union's Jobs Committee, which will meet monthly to determine which positions with specialized certifications or licenses may be deserving of additional wage increases. The committee will then be able to take those recommendations to management.

The Villa Park workers' contract lowers the number

"It makes the employees feel more respected."



Members of Local 1277 in the Logan County Health Department.

was a success," she said. "In the past we've negotiated for one to two years. This time around we really developed relationships. It helped us all see that we were in it for the same goal. We wanted a lot of the same things."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Cameron Day and included Heatley, Ken Obremski, Jacob Schultz, Jodie Fox, Patti Garoutte and Karina Valdez.

nity were met while the coronavirus pandemic raged on.

Now the workers have a new contract that rewards them for all the good work they've done throughout the public health crisis. The new agreement gives members an average wage increase in the first year of the contract of 13.1%, with some as high 18.8%. Over the life of the four-year contract, members in the bargaining unit will have received a 21% wage increase on average.

Local 1277 is a small local with only 20 represented employees. Sometimes in the past, management has stepped in to fill in on jobs that otherwise should have been done by union members. This new contract also makes clear the union's right to decide if and when management can step in.

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Erik Hostetter and included Oltmanns, Vice

3.25% increase for each of the contract's four years. Local 964 also won three new steps above the current highest step, allowing workers who were previously topped-out to earn 6% more through the next steps.

Landsgrebe said that retaining new employees was on the top of his mind as they went into bargaining. They had a number of people hired who only stayed for one year before leaving for another municipality.

of years needed to qualify for longevity, down to six from the previous eight. Now, workers will get bonuses paid out every five years after they reach longevity, with the highest bonus amount being \$1,754.

The Villa Park negotiating team included Council 31 Staff Representative Edgar Diaz, Landsgrebe, Matt Frieri, Ken Pillar, Alex Heiden and Pete Magnussen. 

SHORT REPORTS

Field Museum workers announce majority support

FIELD MUSEUM WORKERS United/AFSCME (FMWU) announced on Nov. 15 that a majority the museum's workers have signed their union cards—a majority that continues to grow by the day. The Field is one of Chicago's largest and most-visited museums with a broad collection of natural history artifacts. FMWU will be a wall-to-wall union with more than 300 employees represented in the bargaining unit. Workers shared powerful stories of why they formed their union, including watching as 71 of their colleagues were laid off and an additional 56 furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic.

"The next wave of ruthless layoffs can happen at any time," said Emma Turner-Trujillo, an assistant registrar at the museum. "I've seen colleagues in tears and burnt out to the point of leaving museums entirely. We are taking a stand to stop this cycle."

At a press conference on the steps of the museum, the workers vowed to stand together in the face of intimidation and union-busting tactics from the institution's management. Some of those union-busting tactics include leadership hiring a high-priced anti-union law firm, telling staff they are not eligible for the union and holding required staff meetings to discourage union participation.

On Nov. 18, top brass at the Field announced they are refusing to voluntarily recognize the FMWU union. The union will now file for an election with the National Labor Relations Board.

Remembering late President McEntee

THE TRIBUTES TO LATE AFSCME President Emeritus Jerry McEntee came from a current president and a past president, a former secretary of state, the speaker of the House of Representatives, a cabinet member, a US senator, and



Field Museum Workers announce their union is at majority support on Nov. 15.

from members of the McEntee family.

They all described McEntee, who led AFSCME for 31 years through historic growth and who died this summer at the age of 87, as a fearless fighter not only for AFSCME members but for all working families. They described a man of great humor and gregariousness; a figure who could be tough and uncompromising yet loving and loyal to his

allies, friends and family; and a giant in the American labor movement.

AFSCME President Lee Saunders, who led the celebration of McEntee's life at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., described his predecessor as a tenacious organizer, a shrewd political mind, and as a mentor and friend.

"Other than his love for his family, there was nothing Jerry was more passionate about

than the struggle to help working families—especially those who worked in public service—live with greater dignity and security. He was a fearless, fearless, ferocious advocate for AFSCME members. He spoke truth to power," Saunders said.

Presidents Biden and Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi all shared fond memories of McEntee.

"On Capitol Hill, Jerry was a force," Pelosi said. "He was a fiercely loyal ally. He organized neighbor to neighbor, not stranger to stranger. He was values-based and knew his purpose: advancing working families."

White House codifies PSLF

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION announced it is making several changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program that make it easier for borrowers to qualify for student loan forgiveness.

When it was first introduced, PSLF was seen as a way to reward people who made their careers in public service. If you worked at a non-profit or were employed by a government agency, and you made the minimum payments on your student loans every month for 10 years, the federal government would forgive the remaining balance of your loans.

But the program was poorly managed for decades and its rules and guidelines were difficult to parse, resulting in very few borrowers being able to take advantage of it.

"The idea was simple. Qualifying for forgiveness was not," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona told reporters. "As one teacher told me, the system was full of trap doors. If you walk through the wrong one, you're out of luck."

One persistent issue with PSLF was borrowers weren't clear on what types of payments qualified. Under the Biden administration's updated guidelines, borrowers will receive PSLF credits even on payments that are made late, in installments, or in a lump sum. Before the rules were updated, payments would be disqualified if they were made late or were short of the minimum amount, even by only a few cents.

The new rules also clarify that borrowers meet the threshold of having a full-time job if they work at least 30 hours per week.

The changes to the program will be applied to borrowers' accounts in July 2023.

Many AFSCME members qualify for PSLF. To apply for the program, visit StudentAid.gov.

ARISE Awards

On Nov. 16, ARISE Chicago, a faith-labor coalition, honored Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch with its Inspirational Leadership Award. Roberta brought workers from the Field Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago and the School of the Art Institute on stage with her, accepting the award for "all the workers in our state who do the work that keeps us moving forward."



RETIREE NOTES



Chapter 31 retirees wrote more than 7,400 postcards to voters in targeted judicial districts.

AFSCME Retirees Step up to Protect Court

THIS ELECTION SEASON, AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 joined an array of groups and individuals to participate in the Protect Our Court campaign of Citizen Action/Illinois.

This effort began because two critical seats on the Illinois Supreme Court were on the ballot—both in judicial

AFSCME Retirees wrote more than 7,400 postcards to voters in targeted districts.

districts outside Chicago. The outcome of those races would decide the balance of power on the Illinois Supreme Court for years to come, with anti-union billionaires spending millions backing anti-worker candidates to try to gain control of the court. Among their aims was to win a majority that would be prepared to wipe out the Illinois Constitution's pension protection clause.

But the big-money attacks

their own interest.”

IARA Celebrates Female Labor Leaders

THE ILLINOIS ALLIANCE FOR Retired Americans (IARA) celebrated 20 years of organizing on September 13 during the Senior Power Celebration in Springfield. More than 130 labor retiree leaders gathered at the Plumbers & Steamfitters Hall for a new program honoring retiree champions.

Jerry Prete Award

The Jerry Prete Award is given out by the IARA to those who have been strong public advocates for seniors in Illinois. This year, the award was presented to Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

“Since her earliest days with AFSCME Council 31, a part of Roberta’s heart has clearly been with retired employees,” said Don Todd, president of the IARA and a longtime AFSCME member.

Lynch has consistently been an advocate for retirement security and has fought to preserve retiree health insurance and pension benefits in the face of repeated attacks.

Retiree Hero Award

Honoring young champions with a proven track record for working to preserve the rights

of seniors and retirees across the state of Illinois, this award was presented to state Rep. Lakesia Collins (D-Chicago), who began her involvement with the labor movement as a nursing home employee.

Collins worked to create a union to fight for the rights of her coworkers. Before she became an advocate for seniors, she took on a challenge of organizing millennials all over the United States.

“I have always believed in order to achieve these great victories, we must bridge the generational gap,” Collins said.

Frank and Beatrice Lumpkin Award

This is a newly established award to recognize the most dedicated seniors who spent their lives building the labor movement and pushing onward for a better life for everyone.

The inaugural awardee was none other than Bea Lumpkin herself, still going strong at age 104. Her long history in the labor movement started at 15 years old when she lied about her age and went to work at a factory, where she helped organize her fellow workers.

She went on to work as an electronic technician in a steel mill during World War II, and she later became a public school teacher and a leader with the Chicago Teachers Union. One of the most dedicated and passionate movement leaders, Lumpkin has inspired generations and been a driving force in the IARA.

GOP Runs on Cutting Social Security and Medicare

“THEY’RE COMING AFTER your Social Security and Medicare, and they’re saying it out loud,” President Biden told a crowd in October. The president was talking about Republican leaders and the implications if they got control of Congress.


At the time OTM went to press, Republicans were in fact poised to take the House of Representatives with a narrow majority, but Democrats retained control of the Senate. Given Republican candidates’ willingness to run on cuts, threats to Social Security still loom.

According to the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM), “the president was not exaggerating. This is not a matter of nuance; it’s truly existential. Whichever party controls Congress will influence whether Social Security and Medicare will continue as we know them—or be weakened and privatized.”

NCPSSM president Max Richtman went on to lay out that Democrats have made earnest efforts to boost Social Security and Medicare in the 117th Congress and to shore up the finances of both programs. They have introduced legislation to strengthen Social Security and expand benefits, and passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which should significantly lower seniors’ prescription drug costs.

Meanwhile, GOP members of Congress have proposed to break the fundamental promises of both programs.

And it’s not just fringe GOP candidates. Last June, the House Republican Study Committee’s budget blueprint included raising Social Security’s full retirement age—a massive benefit cut that ignores the fact that although some people are living longer, many are not able to continue working until age 70.

AFSCME retirees stand ready to join with seniors nationwide to fight for the protection of these programs should any proposed cuts advance in Congress. 



Retirees and guests at the IARA Senior Power Celebration in Springfield on Sept. 13.



ON THE JOB

Terry Jenkins

AFSCME Local 1805

JUVENILE JUSTICE SUPERVISOR

Tell us about your job at Illinois Youth Center Pere Marquette.

I've been in juvenile justice for 8.5 years. I started out as a juvenile justice specialist, which is what we call a blue shirt. I worked the front line serving youth at IYC Harrisburg starting in 2014 and I came to Pere Marquette in 2017. About 9 months ago, I became a juvenile justice supervisor, which is also a bargaining unit position.

Every morning we do our roll call, where I make sure staff are up to date and we discuss any safety issues before their shift. Then I'll make my rounds, making sure everything is secure and the youth are getting up and ready to start their days. When they come down for the med line, that's when I touch base with them and just try to make sure they start their day off on a positive note.

What is your inspiration to go into work every day?

I like to help the youth in a way of that shows them there's a male role model that they can actually see that looks like them, that comes from a place like them. I try to show them they don't have to be pinned as a certain kind of individual because of the things they've done. They can change their ways.

Most of the youth don't get to see that in the hoods they grow up in. They don't have male role models that are in their 30s telling them they can do anything besides selling drugs and guns. If they see someone who has worked their way up to get a job like mine that shows them they can make something out of themselves.

How does your job provide a public service?

When I first started, a youth asked me why I do this job. I said, "If I could save or just help one of you, that's my goal. If there's 100 of you and at least one comes out and is positive, that's my goal. That's what makes it all worth it."

"If I don't stand up right now, then nobody is going to stand up."

Are you active in your local union?

I've been a steward for four years. I'm active because I like to help people. I didn't know how strong a union could be until I worked at Harrisburg. When I came to Pere Marquette, at first I didn't want to be a steward, but the chief steward was leaving and he said he thought I had potential. I thought, "if I don't stand up right now, then nobody is going to stand up." I just wanted to do my part to build the strength of our union here at Pere Marquette.

How has your union helped you?

I've learned a lot about helping people. Sometimes it's been a struggle getting everyone to work together. But I've seen growth from people on being willing to give their opinion—which helps me become a better supervisor because they are speaking up and having each other's back. It's made me stronger by showing me that the solutions that we come up with actually work.

The word "union" means we're united—sometimes people don't always see that. When I became a steward, they thought I was the union—all union related problems started and ended with me. But I kept reminding them that they are also the union. They have a voice in their union.

What does solidarity mean to you?

Solidarity is important because it shows how people that work together can complete a goal. It shows that anything can be achieved as long as you stand together. We can do anything we set our mind to, no matter how hard it may seem. It could take a few weeks, or it could take months or years, but if we stand together, anything can be done, no matter what obstacle is in front of us. 🦅