

ON THE MOVE



Public libraries: AFSCME members make a difference



Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

AFSCME Council 31
205 N. Michigan Ave.
21st Floor
Chicago, IL 60601

LOCAL COMBATS
STAFFING CRISIS PAGE 4

IDOC EMPLOYEES
AT RISK PAGE 5

COUNCIL 31 CONVENTION
RECAP PAGES 8-9



ON THE MOVE

Illinois On the Move is published six times annually by Illinois Public Employees Council 31 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO. Send correspondence to: bconboy@afscme31.org or: AFSCME, On the Move, 205 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director
Mike Newman, Deputy Director
Ben Conboy, Editor
Julie Wildman, Designer

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

- Executive Director**
Roberta Lynch
- Deputy Director**
Mike Newman
- Private Sector Executive Vice-President**
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237
- Local Government Executive Vice-President**
John Rayburn, Local 1215
- University Executive Vice-President**
Charles Carver, Local 1110
- Secretary**
Dave Delrose, Local 1028
- Treasurer**
David Morris, Local 805

BOARD MEMBERS

- State Conference Board Co-Chairs**
Arnold Black, Local 2971
Cody Dornes, Local 46
Tim Worker, Local 993

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS

- D. Safiya Felters, Local 2854
Susanne Littlefield, Local 2912
Timothy Olaosebikan, Local 3492
Kobie Robinson, Local 3835
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS

- Terry Boone, Local 672
Tom Opolony, Local 89
Tawny Proulx, Local 172
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693
Miguel Vazquez, Local 3297
Danny Williams, Local 29

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS

- Elizabeth Hutson, Local 1019
Jack Matthews, Local 1964
Trudy Williams, Local 3433

REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS

- Jerry Grammer, Local 1175
Keith Kracht, Local 203
Julie Latempt-Brazier, Local 2887
John Medley, Local 1805

TRUSTEES

- Bonnie Brimm, Local 3280
Nicholas McLaughlin, Local 2856
Loretta Soresie, Local 2615

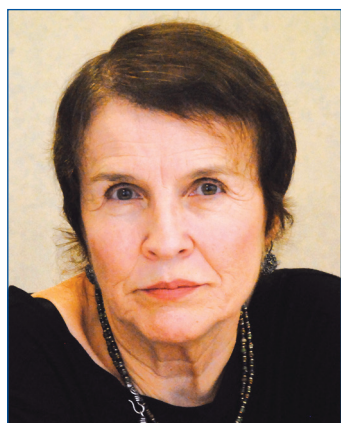
RETIREE CHAPTER 31 PRESIDENT

- Larry Brown

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Honoring the miners who laid the groundwork

Carrying on their struggle for dignity



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE OWE A GREAT DEBT TO THE UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA.

A highlight for me of the recent AFSCME Council 31 biennial convention was our special guest speaker, United Mineworkers of America president, Cecil Roberts.

Cecil Roberts was born into a West Virginia coal mining family. At the age of 17, he went to work in the mines (the sixth successive generation of his family to do so) and rose from the ranks of local union officer to his current position as president of the UMWA.

A U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War, Roberts also serves as chairman of the AFL-CIO Union Veterans Council, a labor organization built to protect working-class veterans and advance their interests.

In his speech to convention delegates, he provided an overview of the early days of union organizing by miners doing some of the hardest, dirtiest and riskiest jobs of their time. Even before the Civil War, and over the ensuing decades, mineworkers literally fought and died, resolutely determined to secure dignity, respect and safety on the job.

Through sheer grit and unyielding resolve, they succeeded. Roberts pointed out that by 1935, the United Mineworkers of America was the biggest union in the entire world.

As such, it set the standard for workers all over this country, raising them out of

extreme poverty to a family-supporting income, providing a measure of security in retirement, and assuring access to health care.

It was particularly meaningful to have President Roberts join us in Springfield because Illinois has strong UMWA roots—especially in central and southern Illinois—going back to the union's earliest days. In fact, the great union leader and organizer, Mother Jones, is buried in the Union Miners Cemetery in Mount Olive, just 50 miles south of the hall where our convention delegates gathered.

The UMWA in southern Illinois laid a foundation of unionism, solidarity, and fortitude that profoundly shaped our own union. Like other public-sector unions in this country, AFSCME is a "young" union in the history of American labor, as public employees did not secure collective bargaining rights until decades after workers in the private sector gained such rights under the National Labor Relations Act.

It was only when the state of Illinois passed its own law guaranteeing bargaining rights to public workers in the 1980s that

union organizing in the public sector exploded all across our state.

By that point in time, many mines in Illinois had already shut down and the mineworkers' union was smaller and less influential here and across the country.

But the groundwork had been laid: The blood that was shed, the picket lines that were walked, the long strikes that were waged, the union principles that were so rigorously upheld—all of this and more was inculcated across generations.

When AFSCME organizers reached out to public employees throughout downstate Illinois in the early days of our union, those workers were more than ready to sign up. They already knew what unionism was all about.

Many Illinois AFSCME members, even today, are the children or grandchildren of union mineworkers. And even those of us who are not direct descendants are nonetheless their progeny as well.

That UMWA legacy, I truly believe, is one of the most important reasons that AFSCME here in Illinois has proven to be so unyielding in the face of countless assaults, so resolute in standing up for social and economic justice, and so unified in the face of all the efforts to divide us.

So we owe a great debt to the UMWA, one we can only repay by carrying on the struggles for human dignity on every front.

When Cecil Roberts spoke to the AFSCME Council 31 convention delegates about the vast influence of the UMWA in the 1930's and its role in shaping the struggles of that time, he had this message for those assembled: Now it is up to you. Your union is the leader in these times. You will define the issues that are essential to the future of working families in our country. And it will be your work, your commitment, your determination that will shape what that future holds.



Cecil Roberts speaks at the Council 31 convention on Oct. 21.

AFSCME local unions respond to library bomb threats

Clearer, faster communication demanded of management

A wave of bomb threats washed over Illinois libraries from mid-September to early October, and AFSCME members at those libraries are engaging with management and their communities to safeguard employees and the public.

Public libraries where AFSCME members work in Aurora, Evanston, Joliet, Springfield and Chicago all received threats.

The threats are part of a disturbing trend in Illinois and across the nation. New laws in states like Texas and Florida allow a vocal minority of parents to contest and have removed from libraries any book they don't like. While Illinois has no such law—and in fact recently passed a law making it illegal for libraries to ban books—that didn't stop the anger from reaching our state.

The rash of threats emerged after Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias—who holds the title of State Librarian—testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee about the dangers of book bans.

Police arrested a 23-year-old man who allegedly made more than 40 bomb threats across Chicago's northern suburbs, including at some of the aforementioned libraries, as well as at schools, local government offices, and grocery stores. Police have not said whether they believe him to be responsible for the threats made against the Chicago Public Library.

"Make no mistake: The disturbing rash of threats against libraries in Chicago and elsewhere and against all who work in or visit them is a cowardly attempt to silence our democracy," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said in a union news release at the time. "It's unacceptable that anyone should face violence on the job, whether threatened or actual, and we greatly appreciate the continued dedication of all library workers and of the public safety personnel and emergency responders who keep our communities safe."

Here is how AFSCME local unions responded to the threats.

reported to them that he too knew nothing.

It wasn't until hours later that employees received any notification of the threat from management.

"What I heard from a lot of our members that day was frustration and dismay at the lack of quick communication," Broeren said. "People were feeling unsure and unsafe."

especially from the children's department, it feels safe. Now they were threatening our lives."

Daufeldt says that when the first threats came in, management did the right thing by quickly evacuating and then closing the libraries for the remainder of the day, all while communicating what was going on to employees. When a third threat

help people.

So when the library received two bomb threats, it came as a shock.

"I'm only 29 and I've wanted to be a librarian since I was a teenager," he said. "Then you have people telling me I want to hurt kids. It's the farthest thing from it. We want to make sure that everyone is safe here. We want everyone to feel welcomed here."



Chicago Public Library

Caroline Broeren is chief steward of AFSCME Local 1215, which represents almost 700 employees in the Chicago Public Library system. She works at the Harold Washington Library, the system's flagship branch in downtown Chicago where the first threat against the system was made.

It was the end of the workday, and a system-wide meeting of children's librarians was just wrapping up when another steward approached Broeren to ask her if she knew what was going on. She had seen a news article saying there was a bomb threat made against the library, but this was the first any of them had heard about it. A security guard on the 9th floor

In labor-management meetings that followed, Local 1215 demanded clearer and more transparent communication from management—not just for library workers, but for the peace of mind of their communities as well.

Evanston Public Library

Kim Daufeldt has been a children's librarian at the Evanston Public Library for 13 years. When that library got the first of three threats, she said it was the first time she's ever felt unsafe at work.

"This is normally a safe job," said Daufeldt, the vice president of AFSCME Local 1891. "You deal with the public and sometimes they can be unpredictable, but

came days later, local police advised that evacuating and closing the libraries again was unnecessary because the threats were deemed not credible.


Daufeldt echoes what union members at other libraries have said: Communication needs to be quick and clear. Her local has recommended that management send out a mass text when there is an emergency, or another threat made against the library and its staff.

Aurora Public Library

The president of AFSCME Local 2238 at the Aurora Public Library, Cesar Ortega has always wanted to be a librarian because he's always wanted to

After the second threat, management gave workers the option to either stay or go home for the day. Ortega wishes they would have just made the decision to close without putting the onus on workers.

The local union discussed with management the importance of centralizing communication when a crisis arises. There's a mass text system to communicate with staff when there are severe weather events and other emergencies. Local 2238 stressed that this same system needed to be used in the event of threats or disruptions to quickly communicate the situation to staff.

"Employees shouldn't be hearing about this through word of mouth," Ortega said. 

Local 2040 members take bus driver shortage into their own hands

New training program spearheaded by AFSCME fills all driver vacancies

As in so many other workplaces, the school bus drivers of AFSCME Local 2040 at the East Moline School District were faced with mounting staff shortages resulting from the pandemic.

When students returned to school in 2021, retirements and resignations forced bus drivers to double, sometimes even triple, the number of students picked up by a single bus.

“The buses would get so full that we couldn’t pick any more kids up,” said Ann Torres, a bus driver in East Moline for 13 years. “We’d have to go back for them. That’s strenuous for everybody—the families, the students, the drivers and the school. It was a struggle.”

So Local 2040 spearheaded a novel effort: Their union would develop and run a program that taught people how to drive a bus and pass their CDL exam—and make sure they had a job with the district once they passed.

To top it off, the new trainees would be hired immediately as bus monitors so they could

learn the ropes of managing the bus and the students while going through classroom instruction.

Ray Graham, a transportation co-lead and Local 2040’s vice president, said that the effort was conceived of and driven by the union, but was bolstered by strong support from management, who agreed that they needed to pull out all the stops to recruit more drivers—including offering up to thousands of dollars in recruitment and retention bonuses for both new drivers and any current driver who referred them.

The union launched the program in 2021, right as students started to return to school after the pandemic hiatus.

CDL classes can be expensive, sometimes costing thousands of dollars to just get the necessary experience to even

take the test. In the program Local 2040 initiated, it costs nothing.

“We come in with the mindset that we are a service to our community, and we tried to impart that on the people in the classes,” said Torres, who also serves as one of three classroom instructors.

It was critical that the program be taught by the school bus drivers in Local 2040 rather than outside instructors, Graham said. They know the ropes better than anyone else, and they know exactly what the new drivers need to be taught.

“Driving a school bus is not easy and people are intimidated by it,” Graham said. “It seems to help having an actual bus driver doing the teaching. It makes people feel comfortable.”

The program has been a hit. Not only do all 34 of the district’s buses have drivers in their seats, they now have enough drivers that some are put on standby duty to pick up routes for any sick drivers. In all, 25 people have graduated from the program.

Local 2040 hopes that other school districts grappling with staffing issues will be



From left: Bus drivers/CDL instructors Ann Torres, Alexis Davis and Amber Kindhart.

inspired by the progress East Moline has made.

Torres’ advice to other local unions that represent school bus drivers?

“First you need to do research about the state’s

requirements for CDL drivers, and for school bus drivers specifically,” she said. “Then you need instructors with personality, someone who is flexible and passionate about helping others.”

AFSCME intervenes to block sale of DeKalb nursing home

The sale of the DeKalb County Nursing Home to a for-profit buyer has been blocked by a state review board after new light was shed on the questionable background and ethics of its would-be for-profit buyer.

“We know there’s more work to be done,” said Chuck Simpson, AFSCME Local 3537’s president and a restorative aide at the home. “But we’re happy to know that the union will live on here at a public nursing home. We’re all very proud of this home, and we’re all so happy that this sale didn’t go through.”

The DeKalb County Board voted last year to sell the home—which has been

publicly-owned and operated for 170 years—to Illuminate H.C. Another company, Saba Healthcare, also entered a bid to buy the home, but was strongly rejected by the DeKalb County Board due to its questionable history.

But it was later revealed before the Illinois Health Facilities and Review Board that Illuminate H.C. had purchased Saba Healthcare. Local 3537 and Council 31 both spoke to

the review board, expressing the union’s concern about the company’s checkered past. The review board agreed, and declined to let the sale continue.

“When you have something good, you fight for it.”

Even as the nursing home remains in public hands, the members of Local 3537 will still receive a bonus that was tied to the sale.

An agreement made to keep employees on through the end of the sale included a retention bonus of \$2 an hour

for every hour worked from August 2022 through “the date of the sale.” With no other sale prospects on the horizon, the bonus came due at the termination of the plan.

From the start of the sale process to its ultimate termination, Local 3537 never stopped fighting. They engaged with the home’s council of residents to organize letter-writing campaigns and petitions and encouraged residents and staff to voice their disagreement with turning their public good into a for-profit company.

“When you have something good, you fight for it,” Simpson said.

Shortly after the sale was terminated, Local 3537 started bargaining a new contract. They want to turn over a new leaf and show that the DeKalb



In a year-long fight, Local 3537 successfully beat back the privatization of their workplace.

County Nursing Home can continue to thrive in public hands. They’re seeking wage increases that will increase recruitment and retention and demanding fair treatment and respect for staff.

Severe assaults on employees in two state prisons

Serious injuries at Sheridan CC and Joliet Treatment Center

Educator and officer brutally beaten at Sheridan

SHERIDAN CORRECTIONAL Center is a medium-security facility. It's not built for—nor are staff trained to supervise—maximum-security inmates. But that's exactly what the Department of Corrections is now demanding that employees do.

As the department searched for more beds during the pandemic, it made the decision to transfer 400 inmates from Stateville Correctional Center (a maximum-security facility) to Sheridan. To make the transfer possible, the department issued emergency reclassifications of those 400 inmates from maximum to medium security.

Sheridan is considered a program facility with a highly-regarded drug treatment program to facilitate community reentry. Almost overnight, it went from housing medium-risk offenders to people serving life sentences for homicide and sex offenses. Since those inmates have come to Sheridan, the frequency at which contraband is

discovered—most commonly synthetic marijuana, fentanyl and heroin—has exploded.

It was one of those reclassified offenders who recently assaulted two AFSCME members, sending them both to the hospital—one with injuries that required reconstructive plastic surgery on her face.

Tori Boyle is an educator at Sheridan who has been teaching adult basic education for four years. During one of her classes an inmate became agitated, and Boyle told him to leave the class because his behavior was disruptive.

After 30 minutes, he somehow made his way back to the classroom, where he confronted Boyle again. He struck her in the face, splitting her lip in half and opening a gash roughly an inch-and-a-half long.

Once the offender left the classroom, he encountered Chris Nosalik, a correctional officer patrolling the halls, and immediately punched him in the face.

Nick Crisman, president of AFSCME Local 472 at Sheridan, said the local made a number of demands in subsequent meetings with prison management. They demanded that 12 extremely high-risk inmates be transferred immediately, and that the remaining 400 reclassified inmates be transferred as soon as possible. They also demanded that cameras be installed in



Correctional Officer Chris Nosalik required stitches following the assault.

all classrooms, that an electronic lock be installed on the door to the school and that additional radios be provided for staff that don't currently have them.

So far, management has only followed through on the radios—partly. Just 25 of the 60 have been provided.

"I always used to say that it's going to take someone getting hurt for the department to get serious about this," Crisman said. "Now, I don't even think that's enough."

Boyle is still recovering from her physical injuries, while also coping with the psychological aftereffects. She's been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

Nosalik suffered bruises to his head and face, including a cut above his eye that required stitches. He returned to work just two weeks after the incident but had to go on medical leave after persistent vision problems stemming from the assault emerged.

In the absence of any real commitment from departmental leaders, workers have taken it upon themselves to do what they can to tighten security to prevent something like this from happening again.

"We're doing what we can to make Sheridan safer," Crisman said. "But Springfield is not."

Short-staffing contributed to assault on CO at Joliet Treatment Center

A CORRECTIONAL OFFICER AT the Joliet Treatment Center (JTC)—a Department of Corrections facility for offenders with severe mental illnesses—was viciously attacked by an offender. Due to a severe staffing shortage at the facility, she was the only officer in the unit at the time.

The incident began when a nurse passing out medication through one of the units began to feel ill after she reported seeing an inmate consuming an illicit substance which she suspected to be synthetic marijuana.

At this point, a team came through the unit to sweep the cells looking for the substance. Once the team left, just a single officer was left on the floor of the unit. Under fully staffed conditions, there should have been three. She was attempting to get the inmates back in their cells when one lashed out.


The offender slammed

her head against the wall and punched her at least 30 times as her fellow officers ran to her aid. She was rushed to the hospital, then eventually airlifted to Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. She suffered a broken eye socket, nose and left jaw.

"On the next shift after the assault, management wanted the offenders to go back to the programming," said Sheena McClain, vice president of AFSCME Local 1753, which represents workers at the JTC. "We took a stand and said no. They really don't care about the safety of the staff, and that shows it."

The local leadership made clear to management that prioritizing offender programming over the safety of the staff can't continue. When there aren't enough staff, programming should be temporarily halted.

The local also received a commitment from management that they would totally exhaust the overtime list even if the workers can only stay for a half shift, rather than a full shift as management wants. This immediate change has already helped improve officer staffing on the units.

The officer who was assaulted requested that her name not be used. She is still recovering from the numerous fractures and head injuries she suffered. 



The unedited version of this image, which depicts the injuries sustained by educator Tori Boyle, is too graphic to print in *On the Move*.

AFSCME member fights for fairness as DSP and as UAW member

Mary Freigo has been working hard for decades. She would start her day at Milestone, a residential care center for people with developmental disabilities, as a DSP. Then, it was off to the paint shop at the Belvidere Chrysler (now Stellantis) plant, where she was a member of UAW Local 1268.

Freigo is a DSP of 26 years at Milestone and is a member of AFSCME Local 2515-1. For 23 years, up until Stellantis idled its factory near Rockford earlier this year, she would split her days between the paint shop at the factory and caring for the individuals at Milestone. Some days, she would spend every waking hour at both of her jobs.

Despite all the time and energy her demanding jobs consumed, she still found the strength to fight for better conditions at both workplaces.

When she started as a DSP in 1997, she made just \$6 an hour. Now that her AFSCME local has made consistent

progress at the bargaining table and in the legislature, her wages are up to \$21 an hour.

After working with the individuals for so long—she's worked in the same group home for 20 of her 26 years—she forged close bonds with many of them.

"You become family with the individuals," Freigo said. "I could never leave them."


But her UAW brothers and sisters at the plant were also like family to her.

"What keeps me going is trying to make a better future for our kids and our grand-kids," Freigo said. "The [auto] industry today, they're making billions of dollars and we're not

even close to making enough to buy the product we're building."

"We need better jobs not just for us, but for our kids," she said, referencing both the direct care industry and auto workers. "Isn't that what they fought for when those who came before us organized a union?"

Last year Stellantis announced the closure of the Belvidere plant and Mary and thousands of her coworkers lost their jobs. But with new leadership, the UAW launched a massive campaign to improve workers' wages and benefits, striking Big Three auto plants across the country. Reopening the Belvidere plant became a key demand in negotiations with Stellantis.

On Oct. 30, the union announced it had settled with Stellantis, and the agreement provides for the Belvidere plant to reopen. Freigo hasn't yet decided whether she will return to work in the plant part-time, but she's thrilled that the plant will once again churn out vehicles manufactured with union labor. 



Mary Freigo, a member of both AFSCME Local 2515-1 and UAW Local 1268, at a rally to reopen the Belvidere Stellantis plant.

Newberry Library employees secure first contract

More than 60 employees of the Newberry Library—who formed their union, Newberry Workers United/AFSCME, one year ago—have overwhelmingly voted to ratify their first union contract.

The Newberry is an independent research library that opened in 1887. Newberry Workers United/AFSCME represents more than 60 employees including conservators, librarians, library assistants, program coordinators and program assistants, among others.

The four-year agreement includes a 15% increase in pay and ratification bonus while freezing employee costs for health care. It also doubles parental leave, provides bilingual pay and more.

They also fought for—and won—funding so that workers can continue their education. Under their new union contract, employees are eligible for

reimbursement of up to \$1,000 in education costs for anyone who wants to go back to school or get new certifications.

Just as important, the contract will ensure fair and consistent treatment of every employee, greater transparency, and a voice on the job. Workers have won a grievance procedure and quarterly labor-management meetings where they can voice their concerns about workplace policy. No longer can management make unilateral changes without employee input.

"Before, there were so many times when management wouldn't hear us, but with our union, they had to sit down and



AFSCME members at the Newberry Library in Chicago pose on its front steps.

listen," said Cheryl Wegner, a cataloging librarian who served on the union bargaining committee. "Together we can make really positive change in the long run, because employees who are well-paid and well-treated are satisfied and committed to doing a good job."

Dylan Bingham, a program coordinator who also served on the bargaining committee, agreed.


"I see the union as the step we need to take to build a sustainable and trusting relationship between employees and the institution," she said. "I see it as

us making sure they invest in us as much as we invest in them."

Bingham said she was inspired by the wave of organizing that washed over major commercial employers like Amazon and Starbucks, but also those forming their unions locally with some of their fellow cultural workers, like those at the Art Institute of Chicago.

"It was all really exciting," Bingham said. "I felt really lucky that I was able to be part of this greater movement that's been happening in Chicago and across the country. I was committed to the union and wanted to help in any way that I could."

Moving forward, they say their new union contract will help create a better environment for workers and patrons alike.

"I think it will be a lot better for the institution. This could be a really positive change in the long run," Wegner said. "Well-paid employees are satisfied employees who are trying to do a job. Employees who are not overworked can do a good job." 

Elk Grove library workers win with help of community

Engaging local residents key to contract victory

When the members of AFSCME Local 3783 at the Elk Grove Village Public Library sent their union bargaining committee into negotiations with management in March, they were aiming high.

“Our biggest goal was definitely wages, reflecting inflation and rising costs so our members could provide for themselves and their families,” says Alexandra Podraza. A youth services librarian for the past 10 years, she’s also the local’s recording secretary.

In addition, Podraza says, they hoped to win more parental leave, and to level the playing field for members working part-time as library pages—a position that management “really treated as second-class citizens.”

“Everybody else in the library builds up sick time and vacation time based on seniority. We only had what was called ‘page benefit time’, and it took forever to build anything up. I’d work a couple months to even get one shift off,” says Sue Piltaver, a retired teacher with a decade of service as a page.

Also, “the page salary schedule stopped at year 6. Everyone else went to year 20. It wasn’t fair. We may be ‘just pages’, but we’re important to the library. I’m a team player, I go 110 percent. And just because we’re pages doesn’t mean we’re not people.”

Led by AFSCME Council 31 staff representative Colin Theis, the bargaining committee of Podraza, local President Jan Chrzan, Vice President Josh Fulkerson, and Dorothy Aguayo knew that achieving these aims wouldn’t be easy.

Sure enough, Podraza admits, “It was a tough fight to get the big-ticket items we wanted.”

How’d they do it?

“It took a lot more member involvement,” Podraza says. “We had to reach out to our members to show up at [library board] meetings. Members wrote letters to the board describing what it’s like living on the wages they were paid.”

They reached out to the community, too, gathering names of supporters that they delivered to the board.

“We asked the public to sign a petition supporting us,

and in a really short amount of time we got more than 500 signatures,” Podraza says. “It was heartwarming, knowing so many people signed it, and their comments brought tears to my eyes. We even had community members speak to the board.”

“Our library is successful because these folks work hard,” one petition signer wrote.

“Their dedication deserves to be recognized and rewarded,” another added.

“Promptly resolve this contract with a generous offer to these wonderful workers who serve us with professionalism,” yet another signer urged, pointedly asking the board, “What is preventing you from doing this?”

“When you take it out and start spreading the word in the community, that’s huge. Now it’s not just an inside discussion,” Piltaver says. It’s a credit to “all the relationships that employees build. We greet people when they come in, we make them feel welcome, and those relationships are important to the community and to us as a library.”

The bargaining team saw how the widespread member involvement and public support moved management.

“It gave them something to think about,” Podraza says.

“They were concerned and wondering what we would do next, and their attitudes did change. I think the board saw us more as people.”

Changing management’s mindset yielded agreement on a four-year contract that raises base wages by 15%, adds a longevity bonus at 20 years of service, doubles parental leave from two weeks to four, and gives everyone in the unit another floating holiday.

Not least, the local also won fairer treatment for pages, including sick and vacation time, added steps on the pay scale and improved overtime pay.

“They made a lot of nice strides for us—not baby steps but big steps,” Piltaver says. “Percentage increase, added steps, accrual of sick and vacation time—I couldn’t believe it. The gains we made are just tremendous. I never thought we’d get all this in one contract.”

“We’ve been fighting for more than a decade for more equal wages and benefits for pages, so that really is a big one,” Podraza says.

The ratification vote was unanimous.

Bottom line, Podraza says, “A lot of credit has to go to our members. Our committee alone wouldn’t have been enough. Our members needed to come together to drum up support—reaching out to family, friends and the community—and they did.”



Members of Local 3783 pack a meeting of the library board to demand a fair contract.

500

SUPPORTERS STAND WITH ELK GROVE VILLAGE LIBRARY EMPLOYEES!



To: Elk Grove Village Library Board

We the undersigned love our Elk Grove Village library! It is a center of our community and a source of information and learning for residents of all ages. Its employees make the library happen, and they deserve to be fairly paid. We call on you to settle a fair union contract with good pay and benefits NOW!

- Rowena Ahasolo - Jenny Abraham - Hank Agnihotri - Fred Aguayo - Brian Agustin - Alfredo Aldana - Kelsey Allison - Eddie Almaraz - Michelle Anderson - isabella andrade - Eileen Aronoff - Rocío Arreola - Natalie Arroyo - Inga Augustaitis - Laura Augustaitis - Nicole Bacigalupo - Wiktoria Baclawski - Beatrice Baker - Peter Balestrieri - Al Balk - Meg Balk - Rachel Balk - Tammy Balk - Kathrine Bambula - Jessica Banks - Manuela Barbuica - Tracey Barrett - Rebecca Barron - Patrycja Bartela - Danielle Barzano - Donald Bauer - Janet Bauer - Michelle Bauer - Joe Baumann - Tony Bellavia - Kristina Belpedio - Eunis Benecke - Jon Bernick - Amanda Bixler - Brian Bixler - Brianna Bixler - Claudia Bixler - Mary Anne Bixler - Linda Bliss - Alise Blunk - Marilyn Boes - Anna Bolhous - Tracey Burbank - Tim Burns - Diane Byrd - Borge - Charlotte Borge - Tina Boswell - Whichee Boswell - Tracy Bowman - Nancy Bowman - Carol Ann Brady - Melissa Bono - Ryan Bookler - Cathy Colleen Brondeema - Julie Brunetti - Angie Bruno - Cheryl Buchwalter - Melanie Budreck - Bridget Buie - Amy Czarniecki - Erin Chaput - Tom Chavone - Kathleen Cherie - Annie Cargola - Jill Carlson - Rosemarie Carney - Rachel Carrell - Laura Cella - Jessica Chamberlain - Ruth Chapek - Tim Burns - Tim Burns - Diane Byrd - Kathleen Cherie - Michael Cherie - Barbara Christiansen - Debra Chyllo - Donna Citrano - Catherine Clasen - Meredith Cloud - Tess Cochran - Becky Cohen - Judith Nolan Drake - Annamarie Duckmann - Susan Duffy - Tim Dohrer - John Dolce - Jeanine Dorn - Amy Delong - Lorraine Deters - Janet Diaz - Anne Didier - Christine Lindsay Fabian - Sue Farrell - Lori Filby - Dayna Fischer - Keri Fitzgerald - Tara Flynn - Eric Fox - Travis Fuchs - Maddalena G - E Gall - Mary Gallitano - James Gara - Frankie Garcia - Barb Gennardo - Kathleen Gerlich - Margorata Gil - Mary Giles - Linda Gillespie - Katelyn Giovanni - Elizabeth Glanzmann - Emily Glimco - Glimco - Rosann Grahovac - Mark Gray - Nicolette Grivas - Rosemary Grundeis - Christine Guagenti - Kelly Guagenti - Lawrence Guagenti - Molly Guagenti - Rose Guban - Lauren Guzik - Jeff Knutsen - Christine Kolcz - Pattie Koltun - Kathy Kolvek - p koszela - Dessi Kotzakova - Judi Krengiel - Tina Lal - Alexander Lang - Courtney Lang - Matt Lang - Lisa Lang - Jamie Lankford - Malinda Larkin - Cindy Lechtenberg - Elissa Ledvort - Gloria Leon - Sharon Leschke - Courtney Lewis - John Lewis - Phil Lewis - Anders Lindall - Ronald Lindfors - Ronald Lindfors - Celia Little - Adriana Lopez Esparza - Jennifer Lynch - Valeria Macias - AnMarie Mackey - Sheila Malone - Maureen Maloney - Ronald Lindfors - Ronald Lindfors - Celia Little - Adriana Lopez Esparza - Jennifer Lynch - Valeria Macias - AnMarie Mendez - Tom Meyers - Aneta Michniak - Aneta Michniak - Erik Medina - Esteban Medina - Jayline Medina - Susana Medina - Enrique Medina - Kelly Meents - Gina Mohr - Joyce Monfortl - Joan Moore - Marge Moore - Graciela Morales - Lydianne Morris - Nancy Najera - Rebekah Nattas - Pat Naughton - Gerry Nendick - Michelle Nicolet - Mulka - James Muller - Mary Munns - Stephany Muñoz - Megan Myers - Kenny Santos - Noel Savio - Scott Saxe - Mia Schlottman - Rebecca Russell - Hassina Sainsi - Patricia Paonessa - Judy Papi - Judy Papi - Amanda Parker - Lelaína Parker - Robert Parrella - Robert Parrella - Robin Paladino - Gia Palm - Peggy Podar - Aleksandra Podraza - Judy Podraza - Alixia Preo - Caryl Pritscher - Alex Pulaski - Dakota Pye - des pye - Carrie Ralls - Karen Pieper - Benjamin Pierce - Dan Pike - Anais Reabe - Abby Remian - bethany remian - Julie Remian - Tyler Rentsch - Mara Resendiz - Lola Reyna - Dylan Roberts - Kathy Roberts - Alex Rogers - Kelly Rogers - Constance Romanowski - Megan Rons - Wendy Rosenquist - Debra Roth - Carolina Rowland - Kym Ruggiero - Michael russ - Rebecca Russell - Hassina Sainsi - Denielle Salinas - Liam Saluski - Vanessa Sandoval - Mikayla Santorelli - Kenny Santos - Noel Savio - Scott Saxe - Mia Schlottman - Rebecca Russell - Hassina Sainsi - Scott Schoepp - Karoline Schroeder - Rebecca Schuck - Rebecca Schuck - Katie Schwellenbach - Collin Scott - Pam Scully - Judy Senase - Jennifer Serna - Tess Setchell - Jeff Snyder - Debby Shellard - Robert Shellard - Brenda Shum - Dave Simmons - Kira Simonis - Maria Sinkule - Amy Smith - Patricia Smolin - Alisha Smothers - Stanke - Sherry Starostka - Karen Stevens - Alicia Strojewska - JESSICA SULLIVAN - Mia Svoboda - Christina Sweeney - Samantha Sweet - Monika Stajniak - Diane Szweczyk - Donna Szilvagy - Lisa Szpunar - Suzi Taipovic - Ewelina Taskin - Alyssa Tausch - Tracy Trauscht - Gretchen Trikey - Ailyn Trujillo - Phoebe Tsao - Susan Tumino - Jeanne Tyms - Brian Tippet - Lauren Toledo - Patricia Touhey - Alyssa Trausch - Tracy Trauscht - Gretchen Trikey - Ailyn Trujillo - Phoebe Tsao - Susan Tumino - Jeanne Tyms - andrew uhlenhake - Ethan Ullberg - Mimosa Unno - Michelle Valdez - Donald Vanderweel - Cindy Vespo - Antoinette Viola - Melissa Wagner - Holly Walczak - Robyn Waldman - Katherine Wedell - Cindy Weik - Michelle Weippert - Joanna Weiss - Christi Wessel - Diane Williams - Lynn Willis - Lillian Windsor - Katie Winstead - Jeff Winterstein - Karen Wright - Ava wright - Mary Youhn - Kaitlyne Zamora - Gloria Zavalá - Julie Zea - Sara Zike - lauren zonsius

Local 3783’s petition got 500 signatures from community supporters.

ONE STRONG UNION: 23rd Biennial Convention Recap



More than 450 delegates and guests met in Springfield on October 19-21 for Council 31's 23rd Biennial Convention to celebrate the convention's theme of "One Strong Union" and to chart our path forward over the next two years.

Two rounds of workshops helped equip delegates and guests with the knowledge and tools necessary to wage successful contract campaigns, when and how to go on strike, meeting the challenge of public pensions, building community support for their unions and more.

Special guest speakers included AFSCME International President Lee Saunders and United Mine Workers of America President Cecil Roberts, who delivered a rousing speech that looked back at how far organized labor has come from the times when striking workers were massacred by corporate mercenaries—and how strength and solidarity can prevent us from returning to those dark times.

During the convention, delegates, guests and executive board members celebrated the last two years of organizing and contract victories that show just how the progress our One Strong Union has made.

Strengthening our union

AFSCME members are building their unions stronger and stronger every day. This helps all of us fight for better wages, benefits and working conditions—but, as Executive Director Roberta Lynch said in her address, it also advances the mission that is at the core of everything we do as union members.

"We're going to continue marching forward arm in arm, bound together by our determination to continue to improve the lives of our members; to stand up against injustice; to oppose the consolidation of wealth in the hands of the ever-fewer; and to help shape a better world. A world that ensures that people have enough to eat and a roof over their head. A world where everyone has a chance in life," Lynch said. "We're going to march forward together."

Closing the convention down, Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman reminded delegates and guests of the power we share.

"[Our enemies] will keep trying and they will keep failing in their mission to divide and destroy us, because we have forged a bond of family and of solidarity, a bond that, with vigilance, we will never, ever allow to be broken," Newman said. "Let's keep moving forward only as AFSCME can. Let's treasure our bond as a union family, and let's move forward in the way we do it best—as One Strong Union."

Charting the Path Forward Resolutions to Guide Our

The following are selected excerpts of resolutions and resolutions can be found on the Council 31 website

Building solidarity from the ground up

Submitted by: Ralph Portwood, Local 1866

BE IT RESOLVED: That affiliated local unions will emphasize the value of connection among members by engaging in social events that allow members to interact and build solidarity; and That by building solidarity through direct action as needed to protect our rights and through organizational and social gatherings, local union affiliates can build vibrant, enduring, and fighting organizations that will effectively advocate for our members and public services.

Protecting our safety and our rights in correctional facilities

Submitted by: Nick Crisman, Local 472

BE IT RESOLVED: That AFSCME Council 31 will continue to fight for the safest possible conditions in all state and county correctional facilities; and that AFSCME Council 31 will continue to lead the fight for employee safety in adult and juvenile correctional facilities at every level in our state, including pressing for the hiring of sufficient staff to ensure that all posts can be covered without excessive overtime burdens on current employees.





Forward: Our Union's Future

as adopted by delegates to the convention. All
text at AFSCME31.org/OneStrongUnionResolutions

Fighting for fair and equitable retirement security for public employees

Submitted by: *Shane Wagner, Local 424*

BE IT RESOLVED: That AFSCME Council 31 will strongly oppose any measure that would unfairly diminish the pension benefits of Illinois public employees and, as such, will continue to inform and mobilize union members to defeat any such threats to their pension benefits; and that AFSCME Council 31 will work with labor allies to develop an educational and legislative strategy to address the inadequacy of the Tier 2 pension benefit, which will include amplifying the voice of Tier 2 members.

Fairness for state university staff

Submitted by: *Kim Pope, Local 981*

BE IT RESOLVED: That AFSCME Council 31 recommits to supporting a robust system of public higher education in Illinois that is affordable to all students seeking post-secondary education, that provides the wide and diverse educational resources necessary for success in the increasingly complex world economy, and that is adequately funded to provide all staff with fair pay and decent benefits.

AFSCME members making a difference

Several outstanding AFSCME members were recognized for their achievements and contributions at work and in their communities.

Public Service Award

For those who have gone above and beyond

Posthumously awarded to **Deidre Silas** of Local 805, a DCFS caseworker who was murdered on the job in 2022.



Steward of the Year

Our most active, well-informed and dedicated local union stewards

Tim Bowden of Local 494, which represents employees at Pontiac Correctional Center, for unfailingly fighting for his members' rights in the high-risk conditions of a maximum-security prison.



Jane Fitzgerald-Gloria Arseneau Award

For extraordinarily dedicated union activists

Trudy Williams, Local 3433, which represents employees in Fulton County government, for tirelessly working on behalf of her members for decades, including leading them through a strike in 2005.



Chicago's proposed budget would reopen shuttered clinics

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's \$16.6 billion 2024 budget takes realistic steps to enact his ambitious agenda of expanding city services, while closing a projected \$538 million shortfall through buoyed revenue projections, improved revenue collection, and other savings.

The budget makes real gains on a number of AFSCME's long-standing policy priorities for the city, particularly when it comes to Chicago's public mental health infrastructure.

Until the late 1980s, the City of Chicago operated a network of 19 public mental health centers primarily staffed by members of AFSCME Local 505. While the number of city-operated clinics was eventually slashed to just five, AFSCME has led the fight to keep clinics open and to establish new clinics to meet the growing need for mental health services.

AFSCME's advocacy

continued once Johnson took office. In July, Council 31 released a report showing how the city could realistically establish 14 new mental health centers over the next four years, starting with two clinics in fiscal year 2024.

According to budget documents published by the city, Johnson's budget starts down that path, increasing the number of city-run mental health centers from five to seven and the number of mental health crisis clinicians from five to 24. It also funds an expansion in headcount, hours and areas served for Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement




teams, Chicago's non-police emergency response program serving people experiencing a mental health crisis.

For city workers who have been struggling with staffing shortages across most departments, improvements in the budget go beyond the city's mental health system. It reinstates the Department of the Environment, creates a

Department of Technology and Innovation, and funds nearly 400 new civilian positions in the Chicago Police Department. The net effect is the creation of hundreds of new jobs meant to make Chicago greener, more efficient, and safer for both residents and workers.

While the city didn't eliminate vacancies to close its anticipated shortfall, the

number of budgeted positions remains flat in some city departments, including the Chicago Public Library. AFSCME's lobbyists have been engaged throughout the budget hearing process, stressing that adequate staffing is necessary.

On Nov. 15, the Chicago City Council passed next year's budget by a vote of 41-8. 

Cook County budget invests in mental health, closes shortfall

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle's \$9.15 billion proposed spending plan would make substantial investments in public mental health services and close an estimated \$162 million budget shortfall without laying off county workers or levying new taxes.

The county health department—which employs more than 800 AFSCME-represented workers and operates two hospitals, community health centers, pharmacies, provides medical care to individuals in the county's custody and more—is slated for a 6.6% increase.

Part of that increase is meant to expand the county's role as a mental health services provider on Chicago's South Side. Over the next year, the proposed budget would open two new mental health units

at the county-owned and operated Provident Hospital, and fund the creation of a new psychiatric facility.

"For years, our union has been advocating for a strong, public mental health system in the Chicagoland region, so we're glad to see significant investments in this recommended budget," said Adrienne Alexander, AFSCME Council 31's intergovernmental affairs director.


In Juvenile Probation and the Office of the Public Defender, the proposal would

add positions and support new programming and technological initiatives, and bolster efforts to fill critical vacancies.

The budget would eliminate nearly 400 vacant positions. Budget documents indicate that more than 75% of those vacancies are positions in Cook County Health, although cuts would impact departments such as Corrections as well.

Alexander stressed that Council 31's legislative team would be paying close attention to the county's plan to eliminate vacancies.

"While we want the county to expand public services sustainably," she continued, "we also want to make sure that the vacancies that this budget would cut won't hurt county workers who are already struggling with vacancies and short-staffing."

The Cook County Board is expected to vote on the recommended budget on Nov. 16. 



HELP WANTED!

AFSCME members like us know our work is important. And we know how important it is to have adequate staffing levels to be able to fulfill our mission.

Keep spreading the word: There are union job openings all across Illinois with fair pay and good benefits serving the public good.



Amanda Crispen

Rehabilitation Workshop Instructor, Fox Developmental Center

Local 1928

Fox Developmental Center has 60

vacancies. Mental health technicians are the highest vacancy title.

“There’s a lot of room to grow. I started as a mental health technician and have promoted up to where I am now. I’ve been here for 26 years, and in that time, I’ve made a lot of really good friends—not just with staff, but with the individuals, too. And because you know them so well, when their faces light up when you come in in the morning, that’s a great feeling.”



Jeremy Givens

Correctional Lieutenant, Lawrence Correctional Center

Local 3600

Lawrence Correctional Center is currently short

some 130 positions.

“The state offers many opportunities. First and foremost is that you become a member of the union. You get brothers and sisters and a family who truly care about you and your safety. That’s something you don’t see anywhere else. Through the Upward Mobility Program, you get the opportunity, training and resources you need to promote up like I did.”



Iris Glover

Bus Driver, Carterville School District

Local 1273

There are 8 vacancies for bus drivers in Carterville

out of 13 total positions.

“It’s a great job, especially if you’re looking for a part-time job that allows you a lot of flexibility during the day. We’re off on all holidays, and you can have summers off if you want them, or you can continue to work and get paid. It’s your choice. If we have any problems, the union helps us solve them.”



Chris Muncey

Account Supervisor, LaSalle Veterans’ Home

Local 3693

The LaSalle Veterans’ Home

today has 130 employees. At full staffing, the home should have nearly 180.

“The benefits of being a state employee are outstanding in comparison to the private sector. Being a part of a union family provides us with job stability and security. It provides us with excellent pay and benefits and a retirement plan. Most of the people who work here stay here for their entire career because the work is so rewarding. It’s a great honor to serve the veterans who have served this country.”



Timothy Olaosebikan

Direct Support Professional, Ray Graham Association

Local 3492

The Ray Graham Association, where

AFSCME members care for people with disabilities, is short roughly 50 positions out of 300 total.

“We have great benefits, like our medical insurance, and we have attractive bonuses and holiday pay because of our union. We have floating holidays, personal time off and sick time, but most importantly, the union is always there for us when we need someone to have our back. We feel like this work is a call to duty. We all look at the individuals as part of our family, which gives us all a purpose to come into work every day.”

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Spread the word!** Share these stories with your friends and family. For more information on how to apply for the jobs detailed here, visit AFSCME31.org/HelpWanted
- Let Council 31 know about staffing shortages in your workplace. Email webaction@afscme31.org and describe the staffing situation at your job and how it impacts your personal and professional life.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME members at NIU after speaking out about wages and working conditions to the university Board of Trustees.

Progress toward fair pay at NIU

SIX WEEKS AFTER NORTHERN Illinois University support staff went public with their frustration over low pay at work and long delays at the bargaining table, they've won a new union contract that makes significant strides toward improving wages.

The two-year agreement includes a 5% pay increase retroactive to July 1, 2023, at least a 3% increase on July 1, 2024, and in both years, additional lump-sum payments ranging from \$800 to \$1,150 per employee based on seniority.

In addition, the contract raises the minimum starting wage to \$16 an hour and allocates funding specifically to address the problem of "inversion", in which new hires have sometimes been paid more than experienced employees.

In late September, nearly 70 members of AFSCME Locals 1890 and 963—which together represent administrative, clerical and building service workers, among others—turned out to a meeting of the university Board of Trustees, each carrying a cut-out in the shape of a foot demanding the board "Stop Walking All Over Us." On each cut-out, employees wrote their hire date, the years of service they've given to the university and their wage.

After several workers spoke passionately about their experiences of being underpaid but still giving their all to the university, every member walked up to where the board was

seated and laid their cut-out in front of them, one by one.

"People were hired after me in academic departments that are smaller than mine, same job title, and they make more than me," Nicole Adams, an office manager in the Department of Psychology, said at the Board of Trustees meeting. "Is that fair? Is that equitable?"

"It's very tough for people to be at almost poverty wages while an administration keeps giving themselves raises year after year," Local 963 President Patrick Sheridan said.

Rave Meyer, an office manager and the president of Local 1890, said that the action made a tremendous impact on the board.

"It was a huge show of solidarity," Meyer said. "It affected the board of trustees. It was only six weeks later that we had a new contract."

In addition to the wage increases and bonuses, their new contract also made significant improvements to employee rights around overtime and probation.

"This agreement represents a critical step forward in our pursuit of a brighter and more equitable future," Meyer said. "Even so, our journey is far from over. Our union will remain steadfast in our commitment to tirelessly work toward realizing these essential goals."

The AFSCME bargaining committee included Meyer and nearly 20 other union members. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Rick Surber.

Rockford city employees win "inclusive" contract

THE MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 1058, which represents nearly 250 workers in the city of Rockford, have won a new contract that has something for all of its diverse groups of workers to be happy about.

High on the local's list of priorities was making sure that 911 telecommunicators in the local achieved pay parity with the telecommunicators in the fire department. They work in the same building and do the same work, so they were demanding they be paid the same.

Local 1058 ultimately accomplished that and more.

They won 14% in across-the-board pay increases on top of a \$2,000 bonus for all

bargaining-unit employees, more than tripled translator pay, secured Juneteenth as a paid holiday, and increased the payout of sick leave upon retirement or death.

For the 911 telecommunicators, they won a new pay schedule that represents an average 15% increase to the hourly rate of pay and an average 23% increase to their annual salary, effective Jan. 1, 2024.

"I think there's always going to be more work to be done," said Darius Morrow, a land use planner and the president of Local 1058. "As long as we don't lose sight of that, we're going to continue to knock things out little by little and continue to make progress."

Because 911 telecommunicators work so hard under such stressful conditions—sometimes with sporadic time off—the local wanted

to secure contract language that would guarantee time off for telecommunicators. They fought for a pilot program that would guarantee all telecommunicators be given a minimum of 24 hours of consecutive rest during each pay period, in addition to the mandatory 12-hour rest period they already get.

"Our whole team feels good that we had a good tentative agreement in our hands," Morrow said. "It touched on all of the different groups in our local. That's one of the things that I think we were glad about. We are trying to be inclusive of all our different sections and people within our local, and I think we've done that."

The Local 1058 bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser, and included Morrow, Christina Loudermilk, TJ Harris, Steve Mangruen, Ron Reinagle, Bob Rever, Pete Fuller, Tracy Pauley, Lisa King-savanh, Elizabeth Hudson and Michelle Slocum.

Evanston city workers make gains

AFTER 10 MONTHS AT THE bargaining table, members of AFSCME Local 1891—which represents more than 300 library, public works, public health and administrative workers in the city of Evanston—won a new contract guaranteeing pay increases commensurate with the rising cost of living, while holding the line on employee health care costs.

Bargaining was slow at first and progress was difficult, said Danny Cullen, Local 1891's



Members of the Local 1058 bargaining committee celebrate after reaching an agreement on a new contract.

president and a water and sewer mechanic of 12 years. The local wanted to turn the tide by showing management that union members wouldn't tolerate bargaining that went on indefinitely.

They began emailing all members in advance of all bargaining sessions, asking them to wear AFSCME green whenever their committee was at the table.

The local also had "Fair Contract" signs distributed at all worksites, where workers proudly displayed them at their desks and on lockers and bulletin boards.

Management didn't like that one bit. All the signs displayed outside of union bulletin boards were removed. So the local got creative: They asked all of their members to display the signs on the dashboards or rear windows of their cars once they pulled up to the city parking lots, where management had no say in what could be displayed.

"The parking lots were just full of these Fair Contract signs," Cullen said. "That was great."

The result of their action was 20% raises over the four-year life of the contract. They successfully beat back proposed increases in health care and won two extra paid days off.

The one contract provision that Cullen called his "pride and joy" concerns the day off members get on their birthday. The union contract always

ensured that everyone gets their birthday off with pay, but if it fell on a weekend, they had to take the adjacent Friday or a Monday. Now, everyone gets a floating holiday the week of their birthday that they can use on any day they choose.

When they brought the agreement to ratification meetings, Cullen said the members' response was "overwhelming happiness."

The Local 1891 bargaining committee included Cullen, Pablo Sarinana, executive vice president, Kim Daufeldt, professional unit vice president, Cheryl Patterson, recording secretary, John Jaminski and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Eugene Boatright.

Head Start workers win contract that helps address staffing shortages

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 900-B in the Champaign County Head Start program set off on their new contract campaign with a simple goal: Win a contract strong enough to improve the economic standing and rights of existing members, and attractive enough to get more employees in the door to alleviate the staffing crisis.

They were 40 employees short, and it was taking a heavy toll.

"We were in a dire situation," said Jen Sims, Local 900-B's president. "The vacancies were rising. We just couldn't serve the children we were supposed to be serving. We either had to freeze enrollments or close classrooms. We made the case to management that this was only going to get worse if we didn't do something now."

The new contract accomplished that and more. Workers won wage increases totaling more than 30% on average and,

for the first time, the contract builds in longevity steps. They also secured three additional days off between Christmas and New Years, and established a paid parental leave program that they hope to expand in the future.

And they gained a provision allowing employees to choose whether they are paid for extra required hours like CPR certification courses or if they get it back in flex time.

"We all feel very good about this new contract," Sims said. "We got the wages that we wanted and that we deserved."

It just feels like we can breathe a sigh of relief; now we can make ends meet and have something sustainable in our bank accounts."

Now, Sims said, applications for these jobs are starting to come in.

"We're hoping that it continues picking up now that the new wages are on the website and job boards," Sims said.

The bargaining committee included Sims, Julianne Watson, Teresa Norman, Audrey Gass and Amber Bueno, and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel.

LOCAL 981 MEMBERS HAVE THEIR BARGAINING COMMITTEE'S BACK

The AFSCME Local 981 bargaining team at Eastern Illinois University was at the bargaining table on Nov. 10—and this time, they brought backup. Union members lined the halls throughout the morning to show management they stand firmly behind their bargaining team.



SHORT REPORTS

AFSCME honors longtime ally William McNary

WILLIAM MCNARY, THE co-director of Citizen Action/Illinois, has recently announced his retirement after decades of dedication to economic justice and service to the working people of Illinois.

To recognize his lifetime of commitment to creating democratic social change, McNary was honored with the Community Support Award at Council 31's 23rd Biennial Convention in October. The award acknowledges the importance of having strong allies in our communities in the fight to improve AFSCME members' lives, and those who have joined with us in forming coalitions to shape a better state and country.

"I can think of few people who have been a more consistent and persistent force in those battles than William McNary," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "Whenever the call goes out to aid workers in their struggles, William has been there to answer it. When we fought to protect our pensions, William fought with us. When we fought against Bruce Rauner's all-out assault, William stood up with us."

"Through all the many marches and rallies and forums and actions and lobbying visits and organizing, there has always been one constant: Citizen Action's strong partnership with AFSCME," McNary said in his



Executive Director Roberta Lynch awards William McNary of Citizen Action/Illinois the Council 31 Community Support Award.

acceptance speech.

McNary and Citizen Action's long history of standing with AFSCME members goes back decades.

The two organizations worked together on voter registration drives in the 1990s and 2000s, and to defeat President George W. Bush's plan to privatize Social Security in 2005.

In his role as head of Citizen Action's national parent USAction, McNary was a key leader in Health Care for America Now; AFSCME was also a partner in this coalition which played an important role in winning passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

Most recently, McNary was a leader of the Responsible Budget Coalition that championed the Fair Tax amendment in 2020. And amid the wave of museum employees and other cultural workers organizing new unions with AFSCME, he has stood with us, speaking out, marching and taking on the boss at institutions like the Field Museum.

Inflation is easing

THE CONSUMER PRICE Index rose 3.2% in October, easing from the September rate of 3.7%, according to data released Nov. 14 by

the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Prices in some sectors—especially at the gas pumps—dropped as well.

The numbers come after a concerted effort spearheaded by the White House to ease the pressure on working people. President Biden has pushed through considerable legislative victories that brought a surge of investment through the American Rescue Plan, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Unleashing a combined \$1 trillion in federal investment in infrastructure and U.S. manufacturing created good-paying union jobs, helped bolster the economy and prevented the country

from sliding into a recession.

Importantly, cooling inflation could mean more than just lower grocery and gas prices. It could signal to the Federal Reserve that it's time to cut interest rates, leading to lower consumer borrowing costs for cars, homes and other large purchases.

Inflation hit working people hard. That's why AFSCME members have successfully made the case at the bargaining table that a rising cost of living should mean pay increases to match.

But cooling inflation numbers are no reason to back off from our demands of fairer wages. We'll continue to fight for what we deserve.



490 DAYS IS FAR TOO LONG

Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville administration has dragged out bargaining with AFSCME Locals 2887 and 2232 for more than 490 days. To let the university chancellor know how unacceptable that is, they showed up to his university-wide address to protest the delays.



ON THE PICKET LINE FOR FAIR WAGES

Employees of the Illinois State Board of Education picketed outside its offices on Nov. 13 to demand an end to long delays at the bargaining table and lackluster wage proposals from management.

RETIREE NOTES

At convention, retirees set ambitious agenda

“WE DEFINITELY HEARD THE echo of Mother Jones” at the 19th Biennial Convention of AFSCME Illinois Retirees Chapter 31, Dekalb County sub-chapter president Melissa Garman said.

A giant of the early American labor movement in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, Mary Harris “Mother” Jones was a fearless fighter for workers’ rights well into her 80s. Convention attendees felt her spirit guiding them as they laid out an agenda for Chapter 31 Retirees over the next two years.

“Groups with deep pockets are focused exclusively on eliminating public-sector pensions, and others [are] determined to end Social Security and Medicare,” Garman said. “That’s why, regardless of our retirement or age, we will continue to grow and organize to protect the benefits that we earned as well as retirement security for all.”

Hall of Fame

INDUCTION IN THE CHAPTER 31 Hall of Fame is an honor bestowed upon members who have gone above and beyond the call of duty. Many unsung heroes have dedicated time,



Members of AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 met in Springfield in October for their biennial convention.

energy and passion to keep members updated, defend retirement benefits, and maintain strong sub-chapters. These are the five members who answered the call and were inducted into the Hall of Fame.

- **Myra Biggs** is the treasurer for Sub-chapter 56 which includes Monroe, Perry, Randolph and Washington Counties. She has been in the position for 10 years. In addition to performing her duties impeccably, she also oversees all aspects of meals for the sub-chapter and jumps in whenever a need arises.
- **Barb Brumfield** first signed an AFSCME union card in 1977 while working as a

caseworker. She became a member of the Illinois Union of Social Service Employees (IUSSE), AFSCME Local 2000. In 1990, she was hired to be a staff representative, and in 1998, IUSSE merged with Council 31. She continued her job in southern Illinois until her retirement in 2010. After retiring, she became an active member of Retiree Sub-chapter 59 and was elected to the executive board, then to first vice president.

- **Ed Corrigan** worked at Pontiac Correctional Center, first as a correctional officer and later as a sergeant. He was an active member of AFSCME Local 494, serving as chief steward and on the

bargaining committee. After his retirement, Ed was almost immediately elected president of Sub-chapter 76, a role in which he served for more than 10 years. He was instrumental in getting members to take action whenever the call was issued.

- **Dick Heitz** began his union career at Hill Correctional Center in Galesburg, where he became a steward in 1986. He was transferred to the Illinois River Correctional Center, where he served on the executive board of Local 3585 before becoming vice president and then president. Upon his retirement in 2011, he joined Sub-chapter 81 and was soon elected president,

continuing until 2021, and was a member of the Chapter 31 Executive Board from 2012 until 2021.

- **John Weir** has been the president of Sub-chapter 55 since 2009, serving Saline, Hardin, Gallatin, and Pope counties. He was elected a Chapter 31 trustee in 2013 and to the chapter executive board in 2019. His focus is to inform and increase the membership. He communicates with members monthly whether they attend the meetings or not and regularly contacts new retirees and new members. His members feel as though they are among the best-informed members in the state.

The following are excerpts from resolutions adopted by delegates to the 19th Biennial Retirees Convention.

Defending Union Rights & Retirement Security in the Public Sector

BE IT RESOLVED: That AFSCME Chapter 31 continue to strongly oppose any measure that would unfairly diminish the pension benefits of Illinois public employees or establish defined contribution plans for such employees; and that AFSCME Chapter 31 will vigorously oppose any effort to repeal the constitutional protections afforded to public employee pensions in Illinois.

Pension Benefit Compounding

BE IT RESOLVED: That Chapter 31, in cooperation with Council 31, will continue to advocate for a compounded 3% annual adjustment for IMRF and those in Tier 2, who were hired by the state and public universities after January 1, 2011.

Protecting Social Security and Medicare

BE IT RESOLVED: That Chapter 31 rejects all efforts to balance the federal budget on the backs of seniors and people with disabilities by cutting benefits in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid for either current or future beneficiaries; and that Illinois AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 will work to enact federal legislation to repeal or significantly modify the GPO and WEP in order to protect the Social Security benefits of affected public retirees.

Containing Prescription Drug Costs

BE IT RESOLVED: That Chapter 31 will continue to fight for common sense policy changes that prevent the tactics brand name and generic drug companies use to block or delay competition and actively support campaigns to stop drug corporations from price gouging patients, insist that government set fair rules to ensure access and affordability for everyone, and rewrite the rules that allow drug corporations monopoly power to price gouge.



Will Daniels

SENIOR SPECIAL AGENT
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE
AFSCME Local 997

What does a revenue special agent do?

I wish I could say I had a typical day, but I never really do. Revenue special agents are sworn law enforcement officers, so most of the time I'm out in the field. Sometimes it will be going out and doing tobacco inspections, for example, but in the process, we'll encounter a business that shouldn't have a product they have. Commonly this would be cigarettes without the proper tax stamps. From there, you have to find out their intent: was it to defraud the state of Illinois? Or was it just an accident?

I serve the people of the state of Illinois. My main goal is to protect the state. My goal is to not only help the business owner become compliant if the rules aren't being followed, but to make sure the state's interest is being served. We serve not only to protect the interests of the state but we're there to protect other business owners.

If there's a business owner who is following the rules and doing everything by the book, it will be very difficult for them to compete with those who are not following the rules. My goal is to make sure everyone is on a level playing field and to make sure that tax laws are being followed.

What kind of crimes do you investigate?

Sales and use tax fraud are some of the bigger crimes we're looking at more. We still look at private individual and business income tax fraud as well.

We do a lot of in-depth, complicated criminal investigations where we will look at individuals or groups who are operating like organized crime syndicates. They will work together to defraud the state out of potentially millions of dollars. Sometimes individuals will give us tips, but a lot of the time, it's our agents themselves

who will locate these businesses through hard work. We'll do surveillance, sometimes covert surveillance. We try to identify people, gather evidence, build a criminal case and bring it to the courts.

But a big part of my job is to have compassion. What we have to ascertain in this job is if people did it with intent or accidentally.

There are instances where people just run the numbers wrong, and I'm sympathetic to that. They weren't trying to steal, they just made a mistake. When that happens, we do our best to help them fix the issues themselves. But there are others where they did it on purpose to defraud the state of Illinois.

What made you want to get into this line of work?

My goal was always to help people. I always thought going into law enforcement, being a police officer is great because you can help people having problems, people who are having difficult times in their lives. They just need someone to show them empathy and compassion. When I was 10 years old, I envisioned that that would be a good type of career to have—one where I could make peoples' lives better.

Are you active in your local union?

I went through steward training about 10 years ago. I was always interested in unions, mainly because having a union is the best support structure for employees. If you don't have someone who's watching your back or looking out for you, then that means you're going to have to do that yourself. I would rather have someone who's got my back to make sure we're getting the wage increases and cost of living adjustments that are going to allow us to maintain a living wage.

How does your union help you do your job more effectively?

They're the ones who can look out for us. I just don't think we can do that on our own. The union is one of the reasons I can do the job I do, because I'm not fixated on what's going to happen with my health insurance or my time off, or what's going to happen to me if I get hurt at work. I don't have to worry about those things. If things do go away, I know that the union will be there. 