

ON THE



MOVE VOTE!

OUR FUTURE IS UP TO US



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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Tax fairness is in our hands

Fair tax vote culminates years of groundwork



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WHY SHOULD MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES PAY TAXES LIKE MILLIONAIRES?

To fully understand the critical importance of the Fair Tax fight we're in right now, it's necessary to recall some recent history. A decade ago, AFSCME joined with other Illinois labor unions and advocacy groups to form the Responsible Budget Coalition. We aimed to restructure the Illinois tax system, making it fairer for working people while stabilizing the state's finances.

For years we'd seen state government grapple with employee layoffs, program cutbacks, and facility closures. Illinois ranked near the bottom in the nation in state funding for K-12 education. Aid to local governments was cut, while state universities were forced to raise tuition.

Clearly Illinois had a structural deficit, meaning that revenues weren't sufficient to sustain the spending required to meet the needs of Illinois residents. But the Constitution required raising taxes on everyone at the same rate—not just those who could afford it. So all too often, the state dealt with budget shortfalls by shorting its payments to employee pension funds.

Something had to be done, and the solution seemed obvious. Illinois is one of only a handful of states in which the wealthy don't pay their fair share. The federal government and 35 states have graduated tax systems with higher rates for higher incomes and lower rates for lower and moderate incomes. But the Illinois Constitution actually bars such a fair tax structure. It's time for a change.

Why should a household making the state average income—around \$65,000 a year—pay taxes like a millionaire?

Looking at our neighbors showed that Illinois was way out of step. Wisconsin and Minnesota have five different tax rates, or brackets, based on income. Kentucky has six brackets, Missouri nine, Iowa 10.

In 2013 our efforts became A Better Illinois, a grassroots movement to convince legislators to put the Fair Tax amendment on the 2014 ballot. Instead, that election gave us a governor whose hostage-taking tactics only deepened the budget crisis: Billionaire Bruce Rauner refused to sign a state spending plan unless the General Assembly complied with his demands to strip public employees of our right to collective bargaining.

Rauner tried desperately to drive down the wages of state employees, eliminate public employee pensions, privatize public services and education and eliminate unions. He had the backing of a crowd of super-rich honchos—most notably billionaire Ken Griffin—and the anti-worker Illinois Policy Institute that they funded.

It took an unrelenting four-year battle led by our union to fight off Bruce Rauner's assaults. In 2018 we were successful in knocking him out for good, and after JB Pritzker took office we were able to restore the wages Rauner had stolen and secure a new state contract with expanded benefits and fair pay increases.

Now we have the chance to win tax fairness for all working people with the Fair Tax constitutional amendment. But guess what? The same forces that attacked AFSCME members and our union, like the Illinois Policy Institute and Ken Griffin, are now attacking the Fair Tax amendment. They don't want to fund public services, jobs and pensions, they want to elimi-

nate them. And they definitely don't want to see the super-rich pay their fair share in taxes.

These opposition forces don't have good arguments to win voters to their side, so they're dead-set on confusing voters about what fair tax reform will do. It's up to every one of us to make sure they don't get away with it.

The facing page includes everything you need to know about the Fair Tax amendment. Here's what it will do:

- Begin to fix the broken system now in place, where working people pay nearly double what the wealthiest 1% pays in state and local taxes as a share of income.
- Make sure the richest top 3% start paying their fair share on income over \$250,000 a year.
- Raise revenue to invest in schools, health care, jobs and other important priorities in every part of the state.

And here's what it won't do, no matter what the opposition's misleading scare tactics might say:

- Does not tax retirement income. Illinois is one of three states that does not tax retirement income, and the amendment's adoption would not change that.
- Does not affect constitutional protection of pensions.
- Does not give legislators any more power to increase taxes than they already have. They can vote to raise our taxes any time currently—but they are required to raise them at the same rate for everyone. The Fair Tax gives them the ability to set higher rates for the higher incomes without raising taxes on the rest of us.

A basic question in the labor movement has always been, "Which side are you on?" The sides on the Fair Tax amendment are clear. The super-rich crowd say "NO" to fairness. Working people say YES to tax fairness, funding fairness and making our state better, too.

Everything you need to know about the FAIR TAX amendment

When you vote, the Fair Tax constitutional amendment will be the first item on your ballot—even before the presidential race.



Question 1 Constitutional Amendment

The proposed amendment grants the State authority to impose higher income tax rates on higher income levels, which is how the federal government and a majority of other states do it. The amendment would remove the portion of the Revenue Article of the Illinois Constitution that is sometimes referred to as the “flat tax,” that requires all taxes on income to be at the same rate. The amendment does not itself change tax rates. It gives the State the ability to impose higher tax rates on those with higher income levels and lower tax rates on those with middle or lower income levels. You are asked to decide whether the proposed amendment should become a part of the Illinois Constitution.

- Yes
- No



Set Things Right

“Under the current tax system, middle-class people pay more in total taxes as a share of their income than wealthy people do. That’s

wrong. I support the Fair Tax amendment to help set things right.”

– Terry Boone
MAINTENANCE SPECIALIST,
GENESECO



Funding Fairness

“We need more funding for schools, health care and jobs in every community. The Fair Tax will generate \$3 billion from the folks at the top—mostly millionaires and billionaires. That’s why I’m voting Yes.”

– Dan Kwiecinski
EQUIPMENT OPERATOR, EVANSTON



Protect Retirement

Illinois is one of the few states that *doesn’t tax retirement income*—not pensions, Social Security or anything else—and

the Fair Tax amendment protects and maintains that exemption. “The wealthy CEOs are against the Fair Tax because it will make them pay their fair share. They want to come after retirees instead. We all need to Vote Yes to protect our retirement.”

– Mary Jones
RETIREE, CHICAGO



Tax Fairness

“I’m voting Yes for the Fair Tax amendment to make the tax system fairer. It will allow taxes to be raised only on people who make more than \$250,000 a year. That’s the top 3%—they should pay their fair share.”

– Trudy Williams
SECRETARY, CANTON



Don’t Be Fooled




“Some special interests are making false claims about what the Fair Tax will do. Don’t be fooled! It will only raise taxes on the wealthy.

If you make under \$250,000, your taxes will go down or stay the same.”

– Jacob Jenkins
HUMAN SERVICES CASEWORKER,
DECATUR

The Other Side

Who’s trying to defeat the Fair Tax? Millionaires and billionaires like Ken Griffin, Sam Zell and Dick Uihlein, and anti-union front groups like the Illinois Policy Institute and the Koch Brothers’ Americans for Prosperity. The same crowd funded Bruce Rauner and wants to cut union wages, end pensions and wipe out bargaining rights.

STRONGER TOGETHER!

AFSCME Council 31 and AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 are joined in supporting the Fair Tax by more than 125 other unions with more than 1 million members.



LEARN MORE & GET INVOLVED
YESFORFAIRTAX.ORG AFSCME31.ORG/VOLUNTEER



Local governments struggle with revenue shortages

Cities, counties and other units of local government have been at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Facing steep increases in the cost of providing critical public services and sharp declines in revenue, local units of government are confronting a mounting crisis.

Local governments employ 14.5 million people in the United States, according to the Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, including the overwhelming majority of first responders. In Illinois, Council 31 local government members staff public health departments, serve as paramedics, care for the elderly in nursing homes, maintain jail security, and play countless other essential roles on the front lines of combatting the pandemic.

Counties expect to spend an additional \$30 billion fighting COVID through FY 2021, a National Association of Counties survey indicates. And a recent survey of cities by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National

League of Cities found that 96% of cities face budget shortfalls this year—in large part due to COVID-19—with at least 43% of all cities reporting unanticipated spending increases this year on top of declining revenues.

At the same time, with businesses closed and consumers staying at home, sales tax revenues are dropping. Income from fees for business licenses, recreational centers, courts, libraries, and real estate transactions are down as well.

Nationwide, state and local governments already cut 1.4 million jobs between February and June. Almost two-thirds of them were held by women.

Most Council 31 locals have averted large-scale




96% of cities face budget shortfalls this year.

layoffs to date, but the worst may be yet to come. During the 2008 “Great Recession,” public sector losses didn’t

register until three years after the private sector’s lowest point. Here in Illinois, the Fair Tax can help to ensure that communities can count on essential state funding to maintain critical public services and jobs.

Nationally, the decisions Congress makes in the coming months will shape how deep the cuts could be later. That’s why AFSCME has been leading the fight to

secure funding to help local governments address budget shortfalls that the pandemic has precipitated. The Democratic-led House of Representatives has already passed the HEROES act which would provide such funding, but Republicans in the Senate have refused to call the measure for a vote. Their obstruction is jeopardizing vital public services and jobs all across the country. 

Budget woes beset Cook County, City of Chicago



Both Cook County and the City of Chicago are forecasting bleak budget scenarios and signaling that all options will be on the table to address expected shortfalls.

The City of Chicago estimates a 2021 Corporate Fund gap of \$1.2 billion. This is driven by several factors, but most

critically a \$783.2 million projected Corporate Fund revenue loss due to COVID-19, which equates to a 17.7% reduction

from 2020 budgeted Corporate Fund revenues.

“This disease has forced a seismic disruption of our economy, and as a consequence our city’s finances,” Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said.

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 900,000 Chicago residents have filed for unemployment benefits. The city’s unemployment rate has skyrocketed from 3.6% in February to 12.6% as On the Move went to press.

In April, Mayor Lightfoot called reducing the size of city government “penny wise and pound foolish,” noting that the city should play a positive role in keeping the economy moving instead of adding to unemployment, in turn hurting local businesses that rely on discretionary consumer spending. More recently, however, Lightfoot indicated that


layoffs would be on the table in seeking solutions to the budget shortfall.

In Cook County, the dire financial picture is expected to worsen in 2021. Its shortfall is expected to expand to

“This disease has forced a seismic disruption of our economy.”

\$410 million, the largest projected budget gap since 2011 according to county data. That represents a sharp reversal from just a year ago, when the county’s budget had a projected shortfall of just \$18.7 million.

To address the shortfall, the county already cut spending by 6.5% to recoup \$94.5 million. The Cook County Health and Hospitals system eliminated more than 70 non-union administrative and manager positions to save \$5 million this year and is working to cancel or renegotiate its contracts with outside agencies to recover another \$30 million. As part of the job eliminations, more than 35 people were laid off. Like Chicago, Cook County’s executive signaled more layoffs or furloughs may be coming.

“This is a very tough year,” said Council 31 Associate Director Claudia Roberson. “But we’re determined to do everything that we can to avoid layoffs with all of their damaging personal and community consequences.” 

AFSCME members help students thrive—safely

It was a back-to-school time unlike any other this year as AFSCME members in education settings prepared the way for the students and families they serve. From early childhood to higher education, AFSCME Council 31 members are navigating a radically changed school community while advocating for the resources and protections needed for a safe workplace and learning environment.

In Rockford, 30-year veteran paraprofessional and Local 698 President Betty Christiansen works in early childhood education programs, screening children and assisting in the classroom. The special education students she and her co-workers work with are especially vulnerable. Many cannot tolerate wearing masks but require close, hands-on care.

Members of Christiansen's local were anxious about the return to in-person classes, an anxiety compounded by the administration's lack of communication.

"The plan has changed so many times," Christiansen said. "There was very little information shared, and when they did communicate, they often left paraprofessionals out of the loop and in the dark. Our union has brought members' concerns to the administration and pushed them for a plan."

Advocating for protections

The union has also played an important role in educating members on newly expanded family leave rights. Although most paraprofessionals are women, often moms of children with special needs themselves, many were previously ineligible for Family and Medical Leave Act protection because they did not work enough hours.

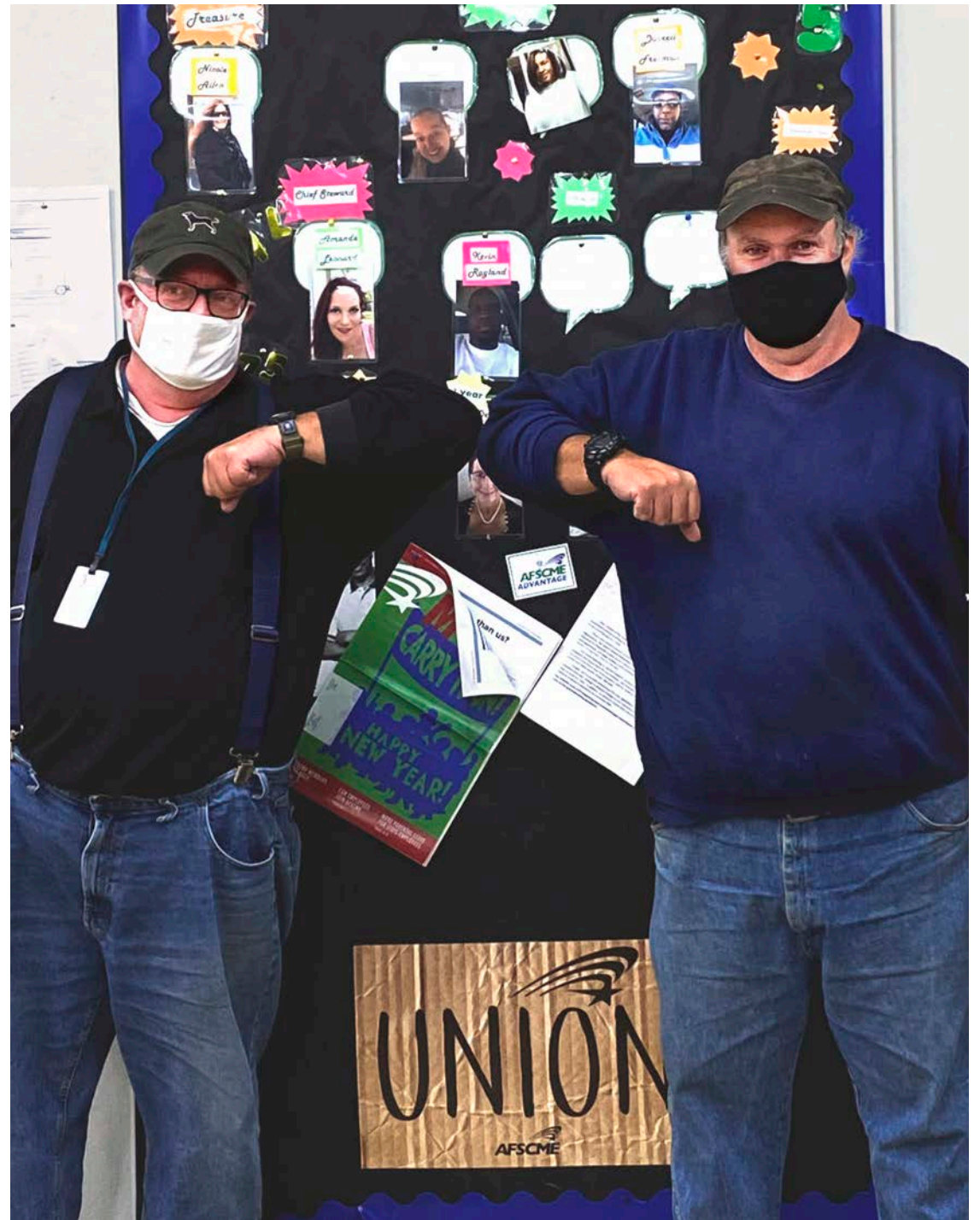
The most impactful recent victory, however, was the expansion of unemployment benefits to cover school district employees.

"Our members made a lot of phone calls to help get the legislation passed," Christiansen said. "I'm so thankful we have a union that thought of us; I don't know what we would have done otherwise. Many of our members live paycheck to paycheck and are single moms."

Christiansen noted that no members have been laid off, and with the help of the union, those impacted by program closures were reassigned to comparable jobs in locations of the employee's choice.

Local 1275 President Catina Barnett also worked hard to ensure that her members—Rockford Public Schools bus drivers—had the information they needed, despite the administration's lack of communication. Barnett regularly updates the local's Facebook page, disseminates information via group texts and personally calls members who are less social-media savvy.

Drivers in Local 1275 were excited to come back to school, reconnect with students and families on their routes and be a part of supporting the community during this difficult time. But drivers were also concerned about a lack of personal protective equipment: RPS only issued two masks per driver, and drivers were given additional cleaning duties using new and potentially hazard-



had been out of the classroom since mid-March and would now be returning with a new set of

"We're going to get through this. We know AFSCME has our back."

ous chemical cleaning agents, issues the local is continuing to address through labor-management meetings.

Unique challenges

In Champaign-Urbana, AFSCME Local 3700 members at the University of Illinois Child Development Lab and Early Childhood Development Lab returned to in-person classes with much apprehension. Consistency is key when working with young children, member Lisa Pannbacker observed, but the children in the program

rules to enforce social distancing. Fortunately, some measures to prevent the spread of the virus were second nature to staff in preschool settings, such as washing hands frequently and sanitizing surfaces and play materials.

Unlike many other high-risk settings, the university provides for regular testing on paid time. Employees can either get tested during their regular work hours with no loss of pay or receive pay for time spent testing while off-uty. And when an exposure occurs, employees receive paid time off for the quarantine period, Pannbacker said.


At the Illinois School for the Deaf and Illinois School for the Visually Impaired in Jacksonville, back-to-school brought a different set of challenges. AFSCME members at the schools work both in the classroom and in residential settings. With classes going virtual, members feared for their job security, but also felt strongly that with support, they could adapt their work to the new circumstances.

"Fear and emotions are running high," said Local 38 President Shelly Hoots. "At first, management wanted to assign us to janitorial work while the school was closed for in-person classes, but we would not allow any erosion of the contract. We also felt we would benefit students more by continuing to do the things we do when we're in the dorm with them."

Prior to the last labor-management meeting, the local used a video conferencing platform to bring members

together to develop a proposal for using their skills to help students continue to develop their independence while learning off-site.

When students are on-site, residential staff help them with a wide range of tasks, from preparing snacks to sewing buttons and making beds to dressing themselves. The local proposed a plan for engaging residential staff to help the schools develop training modules that students and their families could use at home, allowing them to continue to develop these important life skills. One idea was to produce a series of videos with corresponding slide presentations that students and their families could do at home, like a how to make a grilled cheese sandwich step by step.

"My members are the reason I keep pushing," Hoots said. "I want everybody to know we're going to get through this. We know AFSCME has our back." 

Pension fund elections: Make your voice heard

Union members running for pension fund trustee positions

Elected trustees serve a vital role on pension fund boards. That's why AFSCME has always sought to strengthen Illinois public pension funds by working to elect union members and retirees who can serve as strong voices for frontline workers. This fall, several pension funds are holding trustee elections. Below are the AFSCME-supported candidates.

Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF)

IMRF ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS will elect two Employee Trustees this November, each to serve a 5-year term. AFSCME is supporting AFSCME member Tracie Mitchell and IEA member Hugh Cunningham.

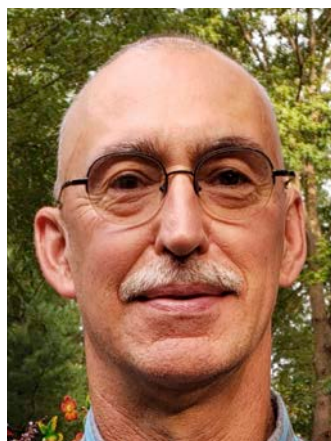
Tracie Mitchell is an Emergency Communication Specialist for the Central Illinois Dispatch Center. She is Recording Secretary of AFSCME Local 268 and serves as both



Member Chair and PEOPLE Chair for her local. Tracie is a relentless advocate for public service workers and knows first hand the importance of maintaining the retirement security that comes with IMRF participation. In 2018

when the City of Decatur transitioned dispatch operations to a new employer, Tracie fought to ensure employees would maintain their IMRF status. Tracie seeks election on the IMRF Board of Trustees to carry on the work of previous AFSCME-backed trustees to preserve the fiscal security of the pension fund and the continuation of pension benefits.

Hugh Cunningham is the copresident of the Triad Custodial, Maintenance and Utility Association (CMUA)/Illinois Education Association (IEA). He has served on numerous bargaining teams to represent the interests of the local union members in the TRIAD Community Unit School District in Madison County. Hugh has been an active union leader and will continue to advocate for the retirement security of all participants within the IMRF.



IMRF RETIREES will elect an Annuitant Trustee in the November election. AFSCME Chapter 31 is supporting former IMRF Executive Director Louis Kosiba.

Louis Kosiba is the former Executive Director of the IMRF and member of AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31. During his 28 years with the IMRF, Louis was both the manager of field services and general counsel in addition to executive director. He has been a staunch supporter of guaranteed pension benefits and the rights of employees and retirees under both the Illinois Pension Code and the Illinois Constitution. He will bring his experience, expertise and energy to the table to keep IMRF the best-funded pension system in Illinois. He will be an effective and powerful voice for retirees.



Ballots for the Fall IMRF elections will be mailed to members and retirees at the end of October. To be counted, ballots must be received by the IMRF by December 4.

Cook County Pension Fund (CCPF)

This October Cook County employees will have the opportunity to re-elect Kevin Ochalla to the Cook County Pension Fund Board. Kevin was elected in 2017 and is the first AFSCME member to serve on the Cook County Pension Fund Board.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person voting has been cancelled this year. All Cook County employees will be mailed a ballot toward the end of September. Mail ballots must be received by the Cook County Pension Fund no later than October 28 to be counted.

Kevin Ochalla has served as an Assistant Public Defender in Cook County for more than 17 years and is President of AFSCME Local 3315. In both roles Kevin has shown an

unwavering commitment to protecting and defending the rights of individuals. As Trustee, Kevin has stood firm in his commitment to amplify the interests of all Cook County employees in the decision-making of the Board. Over the last three years serving as Trustee, Kevin has become the leading authority for Labor's interests on the Board and an outspoken voice on various issues of concern- from legislation impacting the funding and independence of the pension fund to retiree health benefits. Kevin is a proven leader on the Cook County Pension Fund Board.



Municipal Employees' Annuity and Benefit Fund of Chicago (MEABF)

This October City of Chicago employees will have the opportunity to re-elect Verna Thompson as Trustee on the MEABF Board. Verna was first elected in 2017. The MEABF will hold its Trustee Election via telephone and online portal the week of October 26-30. Voting credentials will be distributed to City of Chicago employees mid-October prior to the election.

Verna Thompson is an experienced SEIU Local 73 Steward and member activist. She is a dedicated 15-year employee of the City of Chicago at the Office of Emergency Management and Communications. She attended North-eastern Illinois University. Verna was first elected to the MEABF Board in 2017 and has been a committed guardian of MEABF members' interests, ensuring that when workers



retire, they can depend on the pension they worked hard to earn. During her term, Verna has developed a strong working relationship with AFSCME. As trustee, Verna has upheld her commitment to being a strong voice for Chicago employees on the pension fund board and she is seeking re-election to continue the work to ensure the promise of a secure retirement.



PEOPLE power can make the difference in 2020 election

AFSCME members are ready to meet the challenge

Hundreds of delegates from local unions across the state gathered online for AFSCME Council 31's first-ever virtual PEOPLE conference on August 29. Delegates prepared new ways to mobilize voters during the pandemic and made endorsements in key federal and statewide races (see pages 8-9).

The conference was held over Zoom, capping a months-long grassroots process in which local union and retiree delegates in 11 PEOPLE regions across the state reviewed legislative voting records, conducted candidate interviews and pored over responses to the union's candidate questionnaire. Endorsement recommendations from those regional committees were submitted to the PEOPLE statewide executive committee, which voted to endorse all recommended state legislative candidates on August 28.

Presidential election

During a presidential election year, the urgency around Election Day is especially

intense. And since the state expanded early voting and vote-by-mail options because of COVID-19, ballots are already being cast.

The AFSCME International Executive Board voted unanimously to endorse Joe Biden for president earlier this year. He chose Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate in August.

Despite Republican incumbent Donald Trump's outright failure in handling the coronavirus pandemic, his tax policies that heavily favor the already wealthy, his refusal to back COVID-relief legislation to aid hard-hit state and local governments, his efforts to reduce access to health care, and his determination to stoke the flames of division, the presidential race could be extremely tight.



U.S. Senator Dick Durbin

urged union members to stand for a better future by voting for Joe Biden for President: "America has only 4% of the world's population but 20% of all coronavirus-related deaths. Because of the failure in the Trump administration, we've seen 180,000 American lives lost so far [as of August 29]. Each one is a heartbreak. America can do better."



State Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth


encouraged everyone to make their voice heard in this election by voting: "This election year, we have decency on the ballot. Unions are on the ballot. Racial justice is on the ballot. Democracy is on the ballot. We have to come together."

Get out the vote

The Republican strategy relies heavily on voter suppression (preventing Democrats from casting their votes). Trump has tried to sabotage new laws that respond to the risks posed by the

pandemic by expanding vote-by-mail options, going so far as to hamper mail delivery by the U.S. Postal Service.

"Every vote counts in this election," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch, "and AFSCME's political

volunteers will be working to mobilize voters through phone calls and online outreach. Make your plan to vote today." 

To join the Election 2020 Green Brigade, sign up at AFSCME31.org/Volunteer.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD: IT'S TIME TO VOTE

Because of a new state law expanding safe voting options during the pandemic, every voter is eligible to vote by mail. Five million voters who participated in the last three elections received a vote-by-mail application; local election authorities began sending out mail-in ballots on September 24.

Schools and other government facilities will be used as

polling places. And to prevent overcrowding at the polls on Election Day, early voting hours are significantly expanded.

Early voting is already underway. Local election authorities can set aside special voting times for vulnerable populations and a curbside voting option will allow voters to cast a ballot without entering a polling place.

1. REGISTER

Register to vote online at ova.elections.il.gov by October 18. Or you can register in person at your early voting site or polling place.

2. VOLUNTEER

Sign up to join our union's new virtual Get Out the Vote effort at AFSCME31.org/Volunteer.

3. VOTE!

VOTE BY MAIL — request your ballot today at AFSCME31.org/MailBallot

EARLY VOTING — underway in some locations already; check local election authority for information

VOTE ON ELECTION DAY — leave extra time in case of lines



Artwork by Maja Lindall, Age 10.

Vote for Our Future

The 2020 General Election provides a historic opportunity to build a new future for our state and our nation. AFSCME Illinois PEOPLE has endorsed the following candidates who will stand up for workers' rights—and for the health, safety and dignity of every human being.

Election Day is November 3, but the voting process is already underway. Illinois has made voting easier and safer than ever before, expanding early voting and vote-by-mail. See page 7 for everything you need to know about voting in this election.

2020 General Election AFSCME Recommends:

Federal and state legislative incumbents are noted by inclusion of their AFSCME PEOPLE voting record. AFSCME does not typically endorse in uncontested races.



FAIR TAX AMENDMENT

The proposed amendment grants the State authority to impose higher income tax rates on higher income levels, which is how the federal government and a majority of other states do it. The amendment would remove the portion of the Revenue Article of the Illinois Constitution that is sometimes referred to as the “flat tax,” that requires all taxes on income to be at the same rate. The amendment does not itself change tax rates. It gives the State the ability to impose higher tax rates on those with higher income levels and lower tax rates on those with middle or lower income levels. You are asked to decide whether the proposed amendment should become a part of the Illinois Constitution.

NATIONAL



President

Joe Biden



Vice-President

Kamala Harris



U.S. Senate

Dick Durbin, 96%

U.S. House of Representatives

District 1 – Bobby Rush, 100%
District 2 – Robin Kelly, 98%
District 3 – Marie Newman
District 4 – Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, 100%
District 5 – Mike Quigley, 97%
District 6 – Sean Casten, 100%
District 7 – Danny Davis, 99%
District 8 – Raja Krishnamoorthi, 100%
District 9 – Jan Schakowsky, 100%
District 10 – Brad Schneider, 90%
District 11 – Bill Foster, 95%
District 12 – Raymond Lenzi
District 13 – Betsy Dirksen Londrigan
District 14 – Lauren Underwood, 100%
District 17 – Cheri Bustos, 95%

ILLINOIS

Judicial

5th Supreme Court District
– Judy Cates

5th Appellate Court District
– Sarah Smith

3rd Supreme Court District
Retain – Thomas Kilbride

State Senate

Senate District 10 – Robert Martwick, 100%

Senate District 11 – Celina Villanueva, 100%

Senate District 19 – Michael Hastings, 100%

Senate District 25 – Karina Villa, 100% in
the House

Senate District 28 – Laura Murphy, 94%

Senate District 31 – Melinda Bush, 100%

Senate District 34 – Steve Stadelman,
100%

Senate District 40 – Patrick Joyce

Senate District 46 – Dave Koehler, 100%

Senate District 49 – Meg Cappel

State House

House District 16 – Denyse Wang-
Stoneback

House District 17 – Jennifer Gong-
Gershowitz, 100%

House District 18 – Robyn Gabel, 100%

House District 19 – Lindsey LaPointe

House District 20 – Michelle Darbro

House District 35 – Frances Hurley, 100%

House District 37 – Michelle Fadeley

House District 38 – Debbie Meyers-Martin,
94%

House District 41 – Janet Rohr

House District 42 – Ken Mejia-Beal

House District 45 – Diane Pappas, 100%

House District 47 – Jennifer Zordani

House District 48 – Terra Cost Howard,
88%



House District 49 – Maura Hirschauer
 House District 51 – Mary Edly-Allen, 94%
 House District 54 – Maggie Trevor
 House District 55 – Marty Moylan, 100%
 House District 61 – Joyce Mason, 100%
 House District 62 – Sam Yingling, 100%
 House District 64 – Leslie Armstrong-McLeod
 House District 65 – Martha Paschke
 House District 66 – Suzanne Ness
 House District 67 – Maurice West, 94%
 House District 68 – Dave Vella
 House District 70 – Paul Stoddard
 House District 71 – Joan Padilla
 House District 72 – Mike Halpin, 100%
 House District 76 – Lance Yednock, 94%
 House District 77 – Kathleen Willis, 100%
 House District 78 – Camille Lilly, 100%
 House District 79 – Charlene Eads
 House District 80 – Anthony DeLuca, 94%
 House District 81 – Anna Stava-Murray, 82%
 House District 83 – Barbara Hernandez, 100%
 House District 85 – Dagmara “Dee” Avelar
 House District 90 – Seth Wiggins
 House District 92 – Jehan Gordon-Booth, 100%
 House District 94 – Angel Smith
 House District 96 – Sue Scherer, 94%
 House District 97 – Harry Benton
 House District 103 – Carol Ammons, 94%
 House District 111 – Monica Bristow, 88%
 House District 112 – Katie Stuart, 100%

House District 113 – Jay Hoffman, 100%
 House District 114 – LaToya Greenwood, 100%
 House District 116 – Nathan Reitz, 84%

COUNTY

Champaign

Circuit Clerk – Katie Blakeman
 Coroner – Chaundra Bishop
 Treasurer – Cassandra “CJ” Johnson

Cook

State’s Attorney – Kim Foxx

Jackson

Circuit Clerk – Cindy Svanda
 Treasurer – Liz Hunter

Lake

Coroner – Howard Cooper

COUNTY BOARD

District 4 – Gina Roberts
 District 7 – Carissa Casbon
 District 13 – Sandy Hart
 District 16 – Terry Wilke

Madison

Auditor – Joe Silkwood
 Circuit Clerk – Amy Gabriel
 Coroner – Steve Nonn
 State’s Attorney – Crystal Uhe

COUNTY BOARD

Chair – Robert Daiber

District 2 – DeAnn Rizzi
 District 18 – Jack Minner
 District 19 – Dina Burch
 District 20 – Kristen Novacich-Koberna
 District 27 – Paul Rydgig

Peoria

Auditor – Jessica Thomas
 County Clerk – Rachael Parker
 Coroner – Jamie Harwood

Randolph

Circuit Clerk – Sherry Johnson

Rock Island

County Board – Edwin Langdon

Will

Executive – Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant
 Coroner – Laurie Summers

COUNTY BOARD

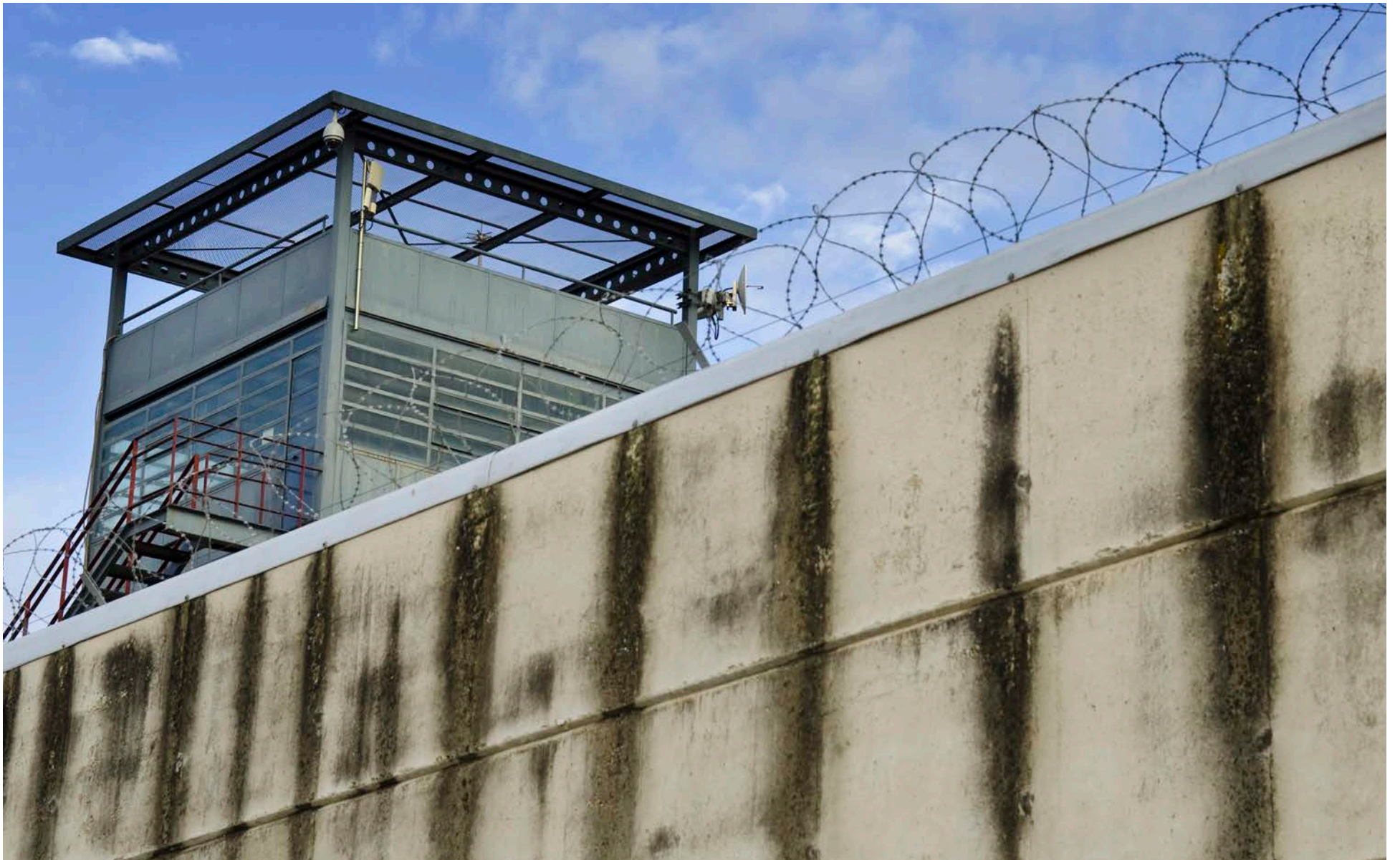
District 1 – Sherry Newquist
 District 12 – Erin Moncek
 District 12 – JoAnne Hamilton-Gunkel
 District 13 – Mica Freeman
 District 13 – Mark Ferry

Winnebago

State’s Attorney – Paul Carpenter
 Board Chair – Joe Chiarelli

COUNTY BOARD

District 4 – Elizabeth Lindquist
 District 17 – Rob Young
 District 19 – Angela Fellars



New Chief Safety Officer position makes prisons safer

Union-created role addresses crises, issues in pandemic

At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in Illinois, AFSCME worked to implement a new role, Chief Safety Officer (CSO), to ensure open, productive communication between management and staff on the ground. It's proving to be an invaluable asset during the ongoing public health crisis.

At each Department of Corrections facility, the local union president or their designee fills the CSO role. This front-line, union-driven approach to safety precautions has successfully shown how valuable collaborative labor relations can be.

"IDOC employees have been on the public safety front lines during this pandemic, working to ensure that Illinois correctional facilities remain safe and secure," Council 31 Regional Director Eddie Caumiant said. "It's an enormously challenging mission even before the coronavirus swept through our state. The union's Chief Safety Officer is there every step of the way to ensure that the safety of all is priority number one."

CHIEF SAFETY OFFICERS



Steve Fanti
LOCAL 472 PRESIDENT
SHERIDAN
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Sheridan had the first positive COVID-19 case within

IDOC—a contractual staff member tested positive and the virus spread to inmates. We were at the forefront; we were trying to get ahead of it and make sure we were handling everything properly, but still uncertain if we were doing everything right. We had pregnant staff that had been exposed, people were panicking.

The CSO position made it so that I've been able to go around to the buildings every day to get information out to people. The union got to be the direct liaison to the membership. During such a trying time, that brought us closer together. We overcame something big and handled it well. We've kept it at just 20 inmates and 15 staff infected. We're pretty proud of what we've been able to do here.

The big thing was being proactive. The union rented hand-washing stations and bought extra sanitizer for sanitizing stations at the front gate. Moving around, seeing things firsthand, I get to talk to the members and they can let me know what's going on. We have open lines of communication. The issues that occur get resolved earlier. I have a daily meeting with the warden and I can bring up concerns.

It's a completely different atmosphere. Everyone is really conscious about what they need to do to mitigate the spread and everyone is doing their part. It makes everything safer, cleaner and makes Sheridan a better institution overall.



Lynn Fields
LOCAL 3654 PRESIDENT
SOUTHWESTERN
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Working more closely with administration, we can deal with things in the moment. I don't have to call my staff rep or shoot an email or wait for the next meeting. If something comes up, we're right there. I walk to each assignment to check in with officers to see if they need anything or if they

have questions; then I can go directly to management to get answers.

We had 15 positive cases at SWCC, all staff members who recovered and are back at work. There have been no inmate cases. Our members can go home and get well, they can be taken care of by their families. But if an inmate gets sick, it's not going to be good. I want to make sure inmates and staff are using masks, practicing social distancing and the facility is clean. When our members are at work, they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. The numbers prove it. Our members are taking this seriously.

Having this new CSO role was an adjustment for everyone, but now it's clear: This is a partnership. The union has an equal voice. Too often we think the union is just about wages, days off, benefits, discipline—but health and safety is a benefit too. It's a key part of our contract that should be enforced and taken seriously. It's something tangible we can see right in front of us every day. We should be really proud that we have the Chief Safety Officer role in Illinois.



Nick Jones

LOCAL 3585 PRESIDENT
ILLINOIS RIVER
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Being Chief Safety Officer allows me to talk to a lot of people each day, bringing information from management in a rapid fashion. And staff are able to tell me things they're seeing firsthand and I can bring that right back to management without having to wait for a labor-management meeting or a grievance. We've been able to solve problems quicker. When we were setting up our quarantine and isolation areas in preparation for what may

“The union’s Chief Safety Officer is there to ensure that the safety of all is priority number one.”

come, I was able to get ideas from military-trained employees and have them put into management’s plans.

It has definitely worked. We’ve had zero sick offenders and only seven staff with the virus—and they were all exposed outside of work. Our staff is working together very hard. They’re setting aside different personal beliefs to do what we need to do on the clock. Just knowing their union is helping make decisions and pushing back against parts they don’t like helps everyone comply with what they have to do right now. Morale is staying somewhat higher than it would have been because they know why we have to do things this way instead of just getting a memo at roll call.

I hope they keep this position. Having a safety officer to move information from top ranks to the bottom and back

up has been very effective in dealing with any possible crises. During the pandemic, I have assisted with staff safety, offender safety, pandemic protocols including quarantine, morale issues, and the safety of offenders being transported. Some of our protocols have been implemented statewide. I’ve been able to work on things I wouldn’t have access to without being the CSO. It’s benefited membership across the board.



Tod Williams

LOCAL 801 PRESIDENT
KEWANEE LIFE SKILLS
RE-ENTRY CENTER

Every day starts with a meeting to go over COVID numbers around the state and to see if

anyone has any issues or suggestions. Then I walk around the facility, talking to AFSCME members. We stay on top of everything and we’ve been able to keep COVID out of the facility so that the inmates didn’t get it.

There has to be cooperation between both parties otherwise it’s not going to work. So now, instead of telling me we’re going to do something, management says, ‘This is what we’re thinking of doing. What do you think?’ With everything, we’ve heard both sides, discussed it and come to an agreement.

We just did an interview with the local newspaper, and we did it together—the warden and the union. Usually in the past we’d be talking to the media separately, but this time when the media came and asked for an interview the warden said he’s going to bring the union president into this.

This experience has been quite different than anything I’ve ever experienced after 25 years in DOC. If they can carry this COS position forward after this COVID crisis is over, the department and the state would be a lot better off.

Instead of being at loggerheads all the time, now we’re getting cooperation between DOC and labor. I’ve been president for 18 years and I’ve never seen this level of cooperation. This is more give and take on both sides, more cooperation and transparency than I’ve ever seen.



Dennis Young


LOCAL 1175 PRESIDENT
MENARD
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Our prison runs really smoothly. There’s a good relationship between AFSCME and the administration. As Chief Safety Officer, I walk and tour the facilities, talking to staff about the availability of PPE,

its proper use and the importance of wearing it.

I’m a whistleblower for unsafe conditions. If I see something unsafe, I go to talk to the warden or administration and see how we can get it fixed. Or management might come to me, for example if someone isn’t wearing PPE properly. Then I can speak with that employee and avoid any discipline. The faster we get this virus mitigated and out of the prisons, the faster we go back to normalcy.

I think the CSO is a needed position during this crisis. It was hard to sell the administration on giving us a safety officer because staffing is such a problem, but making the safety officer be a union member, usually the president of each local, ensures that there’s total transparency from management.

We’re the largest maximum-security prison in the state. There’s still violence every day, we still have a prison to run. The inmates aren’t saying ‘time out’ during the pandemic. Having a union member in the role shows that we’re all here for the same endgame: We want the minimum number of people to get sick. 


MORE CHANGES PLANNED FOR DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

On July 31, Gov. JB Pritzker and Lieutenant Gov. Julianna Stratton held a press conference to announce a four-year plan to revamp the state’s housing and treatment of youth offenders. According to the announcement, the plan will impact the operations of both DOC and DJJ, including the renovation and repurposing of existing facilities and properties.

The goal is smaller, safer more rehabilitative facilities with fewer youths in any one facility and more opportunities for young people to be closer and more connected with their families and communities.

“We cannot continue to be a country that criminalizes the children who need the most help,” Stratton said. “We need to help our young people heal, to redirect their energy, to realize their potential and foster their dreams. It is time for a change.”

The Pritzker administration has stressed that this new plan will not result in employee layoffs or facility closures. They have also stated clearly that they will seek union input throughout the change process. AFSCME will be seeking to ensure that no employees lose pay or are forced to move—and that employees who are committed to the rehabilitation of young offenders will be able to continue to do that important work.

“The success of this initiative depends on the department taking seriously its pledge to heed the voices of frontline employees through their union,” said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. 

“Success depends on heeding the voices of frontline employees.”

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME members helped clean up communities hit hard by a massive summer storm in August: "It was an absolute mess. It took us about four weeks to get it all done," said Local 2823 President Patrick Watson.

AFSCME members tackle storm aftermath

AFSCME MEMBERS ACROSS Illinois helped their communities clean up after a massive late summer storm ripped through the Midwest on August 10.

The storm was classified as a "derecho," which according to the National Weather Service is a widespread (extending more than 240 miles), long-lived wind storm coupled with rain and thunderstorms that can produce destruction similar to hurricanes and tornadoes.

It hit Illinois with 100 mile-per-hour winds and seven tornadoes, including one that moved over Lake Michigan, creating a waterspout. It affected Illinois, Iowa, Indiana and

Michigan. No serious injuries or fatalities were reported, but the devastation to trees and property was severe.

AFSCME members went to

"Everybody pitched in to get this done."

work immediately, cleaning up debris, clearing roads for safe passage and helping their communities put everything right.

"AFSCME members all went above and beyond," said Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Dominic. "After they helped in their own communities, they went to the next town over to help them too. It was truly a team effort."

The city of LaSalle Local

2823 President Patrick Watson said, "It was an absolute mess. It took us about four weeks with six to seven people on a shift, swapping out staff from other departments and working Saturdays, to get it all done. Then we sent crews over to [the nearby town of] Oglesby to help them for a couple days. It was quite exhausting, but everybody pitched in to get this done and they did a great job."

Driving through towns just a month after the massive storm, you might not know there was a storm. But Watson said in LaSalle alone they brought hundreds of dump trucks full of tree debris to dump in a local quarry.

"We burned them, so someone would stay to keep the fire burning so there wasn't a lot of smoke produced," he said. "Members of the public could bring wood too. It was one big bonfire going all day, every day. That fire was burning for almost an entire month."

Four-year agreement in Wauconda

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 2904 in the Village of Wauconda secured a four-agreement with wage increases in each year, retroactive to May 1. While there were modest increases to health insurance costs, they were evenly distributed among all employees and coupled with contract improvements.

Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser led negotiations with bargaining team members including Local 2904 President Jacob Mann and Vice President Mark Gedde.

"With the COVID situation, we were just trying to maintain a good deal," Mann said. "Everything was pretty smooth because of the good relationship we had built with management and we're maintaining everything in our

contract."

The team secured roughly 10% in across-the-board wage increases over the four years and maintained step raises during negotiations that combined online meetings and socially-distant in-person sessions.

"There was an increase in insurance, but that pain has been spread evenly among village employees," Mann said.

"They see our members involved... and that goes a long way."

"That's all we're looking for is fairness."

Mann is a utilities foreman who has worked at the village for nearly 24 years and is proud of his members' contributions

to the local community.

"It's a smaller town so everybody knows everybody," Mann said. "They see our members involved, donating and volunteering their time and that goes a long way."

One local, two contracts

LATE LAST YEAR, THE CITY of Jerseyville sold its water and wastewater systems to a private company, Illinois American Water. AFSCME Local 1479 members found themselves with two different employers right before their next contract needed to be negotiated.

"We negotiated both contracts at the same time while the local also elected a new president, Chad Chandler,"

"The biggest challenge was trying to figure out what was going to work for all of us."

Council 31 Staff Representative Matt Whalen said. "As a first-time president Chad stepped up big-time."

Chandler chaired negotiations for the city contract while former president Tony Layton and member Justin McIver took on the newly private contract with American Water that begins in October. Members in both units got a 3% raise this year; this fall the water employees will receive an additional 3% raise.

"The biggest challenge was trying to work the contract with American Water taking over water and sewer and trying to figure out what was going to work for all of us," Chandler said. He's worked at Jerseyville in the public works department for eight years.

The local is pleased with what they were able to accomplish in such an unusual situation. In addition to the raises, Chandler noted several contract improvements that the bargaining team secured in the two-year agreements.

"We have good insurance benefits now and we will have five more years of insurance after retirement. That's a good benefit. Also, we can now live

five miles out of town, used to be 1.5 miles," which widens the hiring pool, Chandler said. "We were also able to change a position from a supervisor to a foreman, keeping that position a union position."

Gains for frontline employees

AFSCME LOCAL 1537 MEMBERS at Interventions, a private sector drug rehabilitation facility on the south side of Chicago, settled a new contract via Zoom after bargaining was halted by the coronavirus pandemic.

They won a 3% raise in each year of the two-year contract, which was a boost to staff enduring especially difficult working conditions.


"It's pretty crazy around here but we got it done," Local President Craig Porter said. "We're in-patient providing detox and residential services, plus it's for-profit so they want to bring in as many people as they possibly can. It's hard to practice social distancing but since [the pandemic] started only one staff person tested positive and no clients."

In addition to the annual raise, the team negotiated a 50-cent increase to all starting wages in 2020 and another dollar in 2021—and an extra three dollars for starting nursing staff—and held the line on insurance.

"We have to continue on,"

"Right now, we see the patients seem sicker. They need more help."

Porter said. "Right now, we see the patients seem sicker, they need more help. They get discharged and turn around and come right back. It really is [a hard time to stay sober] and there isn't a lot of support. We constantly have staff shortages and the people here have to continue to do the work for the people who left."

Joining Porter on the bargaining committee were Vice President Oliver Ball and Lazheta Thomas-Richardson, aided by Council 31 Staff Representative Cameron Day. 




BRINGING GIFTS OF JOY AFTER TRAGEDY

Four years ago, AFSCME Local 1175 member Terri Liefer and her husband Daniel started the charity group Love Abby to honor their daughter who was killed by a drunk driver in 2015.

In the year after Abby's death, the couple and their four remaining children decided to "create happiness in themselves by creating happiness in others by performing randomized acts of kindness." They found joy in touching so many lives but also found great need in their community.

Love Abby was established to provide support for children in need in Southern Illinois, particularly Randolph County, by donating school supplies, hygiene items and gifts at Christmastime.

For this unusual school year, Liefer and her fellow Local 1175 member Dara Ernsting—with help from their co-workers at Menard Correctional Center and local businesses—collected enough school supplies to fill 278 new backpacks for children who needed them at local schools and foster care settings.

"Throughout the year, book bags go on sale and each year we have more and more people watch for when the sale hits and buy them for Love Abby," Liefer said in a thank you message on the group's Facebook page. "Thank you to everyone that donated... You help make a difference." 



AFSCME Local 1175 members Terri Liefer (left) and Dara Ernsting.

"Thank you to everyone that donated. You help make a difference."

Find out how to help at [Facebook.com/LoveAbby13](https://www.facebook.com/LoveAbby13)

Remote education a balancing act, especially for women

AFSCME members struggle to teach, care for children while working

After closing all K-12 schools last spring during the statewide shutdown, the continuing danger posed by the coronavirus pandemic has led most Illinois school districts to move learning online this fall.

That's keeping kids at home, and as a result, many parents—mothers in particular—are struggling to meet the needs of both their children and their jobs.

Four in five parents don't have anyone at home to help, according to a recent *New York Times* survey, and more than half are supervising school work while also working at their regular jobs. Mothers have taken the brunt of this unprecedented situation, according to federal data. Likely due to the enormous wage gap between men and women, more mothers than fathers have left the labor force since the pandemic hit the United States in March and the trend continues in this school year.

The gender wage gap is smaller for women in unions, and employers are more likely to provide flexible work arrangements where collective bargaining agreements are in place. AFSCME is working to reach agreements with employers that will allow more employees to work remotely and expand rights to flextime, schedule changes and family leave.

These advantages are helping AFSCME members navigate this incredibly challenging time. Here, three hardworking union members and mothers share their story.



JESSICA TAYLOR
AFSCME LOCAL 1274
HILL CORRECTIONAL CENTER,
BUSINESS MANAGER

In March, when school was first out, my youngest was in day care and my then 14-, 11- and 7-year-olds were all at home. I asked my warden if it was possible for me to work remotely

because I was able to do nearly everything from home. That request was denied. So, I decided I was going to take a leave of absence because my 7-year-old needed me. But AFSCME went to work. I started my leave on Thursday, April 9, and by that Monday I got a call saying you can work from home.

I set up at the dining room table so I could work 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. while helping my kids with school. It was really stressful—there were plenty of days where I worked after 3 p.m. to finish up—but it was good to be able to be home with my kids to guide them.

Now I'm back at work again but this fall the expectations are higher. The kids have to be online every day. They have assignments, they're graded, they have [virtual meetings] with their teachers. They do have a program through my YMCA helping kids with e-learning, however it costs money and I'm a single mom with four kids, one in day care.

My plan is to have my 8-year-old home with his brothers, but I worry they'll probably end up fighting and I'll get calls at work. I'm anticipating spending my evenings on school work, having check-ins with teachers. I'm hoping I can [work from home] again. But either way, you know what moms do. We make it work. One way or another.



CHAELECIA COOPER
AFSCME LOCAL 1989
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY,
SPACE ADMINISTRATOR

As parents we're trying to coordinate every aspect of the schooling piece, the health piece, the nutrition piece, making sure they're mentally OK and making sure they're safe. You struggle with all of this. Especially me as a single parent trying to juggle everything.

E-learning is made for people who have a super-huge house. I'm in a two-bedroom townhouse and I've got an 18-year-old, 14-year-old, 11-year-old and 9-year-old. One son is downstairs, one son at the kitchen table and the two girls up in their room.

My kids aren't used to being on a computer

all day. My two youngest have IEPs and part of it is they can't sit still. Every hour I have to check to make sure they're still in class and paying attention. I have to print out the schedules for every kid so I know who is supposed to be in which class at which time and check in with all of them to make sure they're doing what they are supposed to be.

In the meantime, I'm trying to do work myself while trying to get them situated. I'm nervous about losing my job. Everybody is worried.



MELINDA BARRETT
AFSCME LOCAL 2060

COOK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY'S
OFFICE, VICTIM WITNESS SUPERVISOR

It's so hard to find this balance of work and watching kids. My husband is self-employed and I go into work on different days each week. I'm very grateful that I'm flexible in that respect. Usually my husband is home when I'm at work, and the days I'm home, I'm working and watching my son. There are times when both of us are working and I'll get my cousin who lives in our building to watch him.

When I'm working at home, it can be challenging because my son has special needs and he'll act up if he sees me on the phone or pre-occupied. So I try to make certain phone calls when my husband is home. I find myself doing as much as I can before I clock in and after I clock out to make up for the time that I'm helping my son. Sometimes he'll drop away from his Zoom class and I have to bring him back and help him focus. He'll hit his head on the table out of frustration sometimes because he's non-verbal, but he's making strides. I've thought about taking some mornings off. I don't want him to be even more delayed because we can't spend the time.

My co-workers and supervisors are all in the same boat. I feel better knowing I'm not the only one. It's hard, but we're working through it and doing the best we can. We're going to have good days and bad days, but we'll know we tried our best. That's what keeps me going. 🦋

RETIREE NOTES



Vote safe: Vote by mail

VOTING BY MAIL IS EASIER than ever and a good way for seniors to ensure their votes are counted. Gov. Pritzker signed legislation expanding the vote-by-mail program to reduce the risk of COVID-19.

Applications for mail ballots were already sent to voters who participated in the last three elections. You can also apply for a mail ballot online at AFSCME31.org/MailBallot.

Local election authorities began fulfilling ballot requests starting September 24. Once you receive your ballot, return it right away to make your voice heard!

Question your medical bills

MANAGING MEDICAL BILLS can be difficult because they are often complicated and full of medical terminology. What's more, according to the Medical Billing Advocates of America, more than 80% of medical bills for a hospital stay contain errors.

"I received a medical bill for over \$1,500 for my wife's hip replacement, despite having the maximum out-of-pocket of \$1,300," said AFSCME Chapter 31 President Larry Brown, whose insurance is the state's United Health Care plan. "I almost paid it right away before slowing down and questioning the numbers."

Brown had to call both the

insurance company and the provider before they figured out he actually owed only \$500. "I began wondering how many other retirees are like me and usually just pay the bills they receive without really scrutinizing them," he said.

10 steps to help manage medical bills:

1. Understand Your Paperwork: While it's easy to get confused, a medical bill comes from your medical provider and tells you what you need to pay. Your insurance company will send you an Explanation of Benefits (EOB) explaining why you need to pay that amount.

2. Don't Pay Right Away:

While many people feel the need to pay their bills immediately, billing errors are so common that you should first take

your time to determine their accuracy.

3. Verify the Charges:

Don't pay what you don't understand. You can request an itemized bill from your provider.

4. Make Sure the Bill is Adjusted:

Look for the line items that show an adjustment for the contracted rate or insurance payment. If you do not see one, that means your insurance has not yet been applied to the bill.

5. Check that the EOB Matches the Bill:

If you have not received an EOB, that means your insurance company is not yet done processing the bill and determining your portion.

6. Be Persistent to Resolve Issues:

Call your insurance company or provider if you see red flags. Also make

sure you get the name of the people you speak to, noting the date and time.

7. Don't Ignore the Bills:

While you should take time to review your bill, don't ignore a past-due notice.

8. Negotiate:

If the amount you owe is correct but not affordable, ask the provider if there is a prompt-payer discount or a discount if you pay in full.

9. Ask for a Payment Plan:

If you need extra time to pay the bill, ask your provider for a payment plan.

10. Get Help:

Medical Billing Advocates can help you review your bills, ensure charges are accurate and reduce costs. You can find these trained individuals on Copatient.com or BillAdvocates.com.

A new kind of meeting

AFSCME RETIREE SUB-CHAPTERS haven't had face-to-face meetings since the statewide shelter-in-place order was issued in March. By May, some were using teleconference or Zoom meetings to connect and disseminate information.

"While there has been a learning curve," said Kim Johnson, chair of the Chapter's Communications Committee and president of DuPage sub-chapter 68, "I think it is important that we retirees keep in touch with each other and stay updated on issues impacting our benefits."

Seniors are more isolated

in general, due to physical disabilities and living alone. Now many senior buildings are on lockdown with no visitors and little to no human contact.

"In this small way, teleconferencing and virtual meetings can hopefully help people feel connected," Johnson said.

Sub-chapter leaders are reaching out to members via email, mail and phone to let them know how they will be meeting moving forward.

Supporting Black Lives Matter

EARLIER THIS MONTH, Sub-Chapter 86's Executive Board voted unanimously to sign on to a letter supporting the plan to remove certain statues from the Capitol grounds in Springfield, in solidarity with the local chapter of Black Lives Matter.

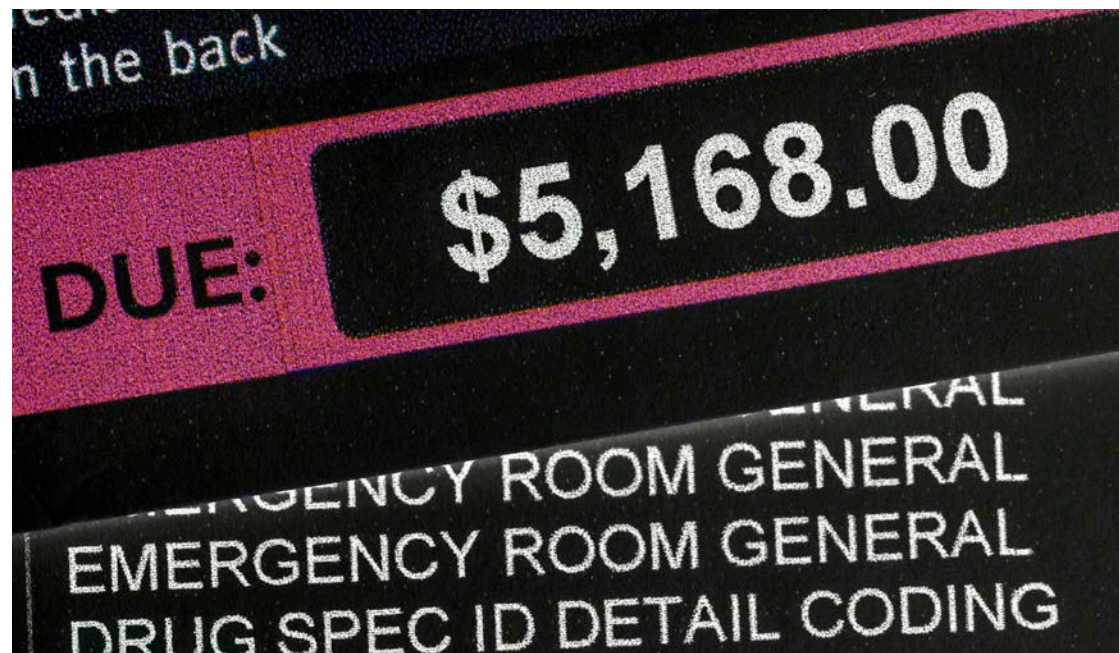
Black Lives Matter-Springfield exists to represent, nurture, protect and empower the local Black community. The organization has hosted several high-profile events, most recently having thousands in a caravan peacefully protesting the killing of George Floyd. The event resulted in Springfield's City Council passing a resolution that May 31 be deemed Black Lives Matter Day.

SERS back pay update

AFTER WINNING THE BATTLE to ensure that every state employee received the back pay they were owed, either for a pay increase withheld by Governor Pat Quinn or step/longevity increases withheld by Bruce Rauner, many are still waiting to get that money incorporated into their SERS pensions.

AFSCME had worked with SERS to decrease the time it estimated it would take to process the increases. Unfortunately, while SERS had believed that they would be able to get all of it completed by the end of the year, COVID-related delays have pushed that out by a few months.

Retiree Chapter 31 will continue to communicate with SERS and assist in any way we can to ensure pensions are updated as quickly as possible.





Jamie Sonta Smith

AFSCME Local 1273

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER,
CARTERVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT #5

Tell us about your job.

The school district has given the students and teachers the option to do full remote or do the blended learning. But our numbers on our buses most days are about the same. In the mornings we pick up all grades and in the afternoons I do junior high and high school.

We have a strict mask enforcement. We have to have the windows down and the hatch is open for ventilation, which will be an issue once it gets colder. We can have up to 50 people on the bus, including the driver and a monitor if you have one. We try but there is no way to social-distance on our buses. None. After the morning runs, we spray the

“We keep these kids safe when they go to school—even more now.”

buses down with disinfectant and in the afternoons they use an electrostatic cleaning device. And, of course, we have hand sanitizer and basic cleaning.

We’ve had to learn completely new routes, with new kids and new areas. Literally every day is something different: new route, new stops, new kids. It’s hard to get these down and memorize it because it’s always changing. Fridays we have reserved for other work—fixing routes, fixing seating charts, cleaning, maintenance and paperwork.

The stress levels are very high, and morale is down. Everyone is losing extra income from field trips and events and sports trips that we would normally be doing. For those of us who rely on

this job for a sole source of income it’s extremely difficult. And some like me have kids at home doing e-learning. My five-year-old is in kindergarten and her school district is totally remote.

What’s your inspiration to go to work every day? What keeps you motivated?

I enjoy working with the children, getting to know them. Being part of their little community. I’ve built a lot of bonds with these kids. I’ve been with them for the last six years. I find myself becoming very invested in how they do in school, when they’re in sports, how they excel and succeed in those things. It’s very rewarding for me to see them do good.

We’re around the kids more, we can tell which kids need the extra attention or who isn’t receiving positive attention. We can see who has problems at home. It helps us pass that along to other people who might be able to help them. I’ve seen kids almost expelled, and then excelling in school. I’ve seen them get the help they need and turn around completely. That’s a good feeling.

When I see kids who have already graduated, they remember me. They say stuff like, you were my favorite bus driver. Things like that mean a lot and make it worth it.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

We keep these kids safe when they go to school—even more now. There are a lot of kids in rural areas who don’t have access to internet and the things they need for e-learning. During the spring, we provided meal delivery to those kids out there, for free.

I knew and the other drivers knew there

were kids that weren’t there but should have been. Kids we knew were in need but weren’t coming. I knew their parents were working or didn’t have a car. So we would take detours to find the kids and make sure they were getting enough meals. I just wanted to make sure that my kids were OK. When they’re on my bus, they’re my kids.

How does your union improve your work?

Being union lets me know there’s someone behind me, backing me up when things get difficult. Like now. A lot of drivers, monitors and staff members in the union were concerned about what we would do when the school shut down in March. Would we get paid, how are we going to survive financially, how is everyone going to make this? The union was there to help us push for what we need, make sure our contracts are being honored and that we’re not just being cast aside because we weren’t needed at that time.

In our current situation, our contract will expire at the end of the school year. We need to pull together to negotiate our contract so we don’t lose benefits we have, like guaranteed pay raises. There are so many issues that we could be addressing and without a union we could be completely disregarded.

I’ve worked for transportation companies who didn’t have a union. We were not treated fairly; we were treated as disposable employees. I know I will never go back.

How has your job impacted your family?

I’m having surgery and I won’t be able to work for six weeks. If I had been in a nonunion workplace I would have been on my own. It’s happened to me before and I got no pay. Now I’ve got sick days saved up and I know my family won’t suffer, we won’t face eviction or having our utilities cut off because I had to have a medically necessary procedure. The union made sure I got those days. 🦋

