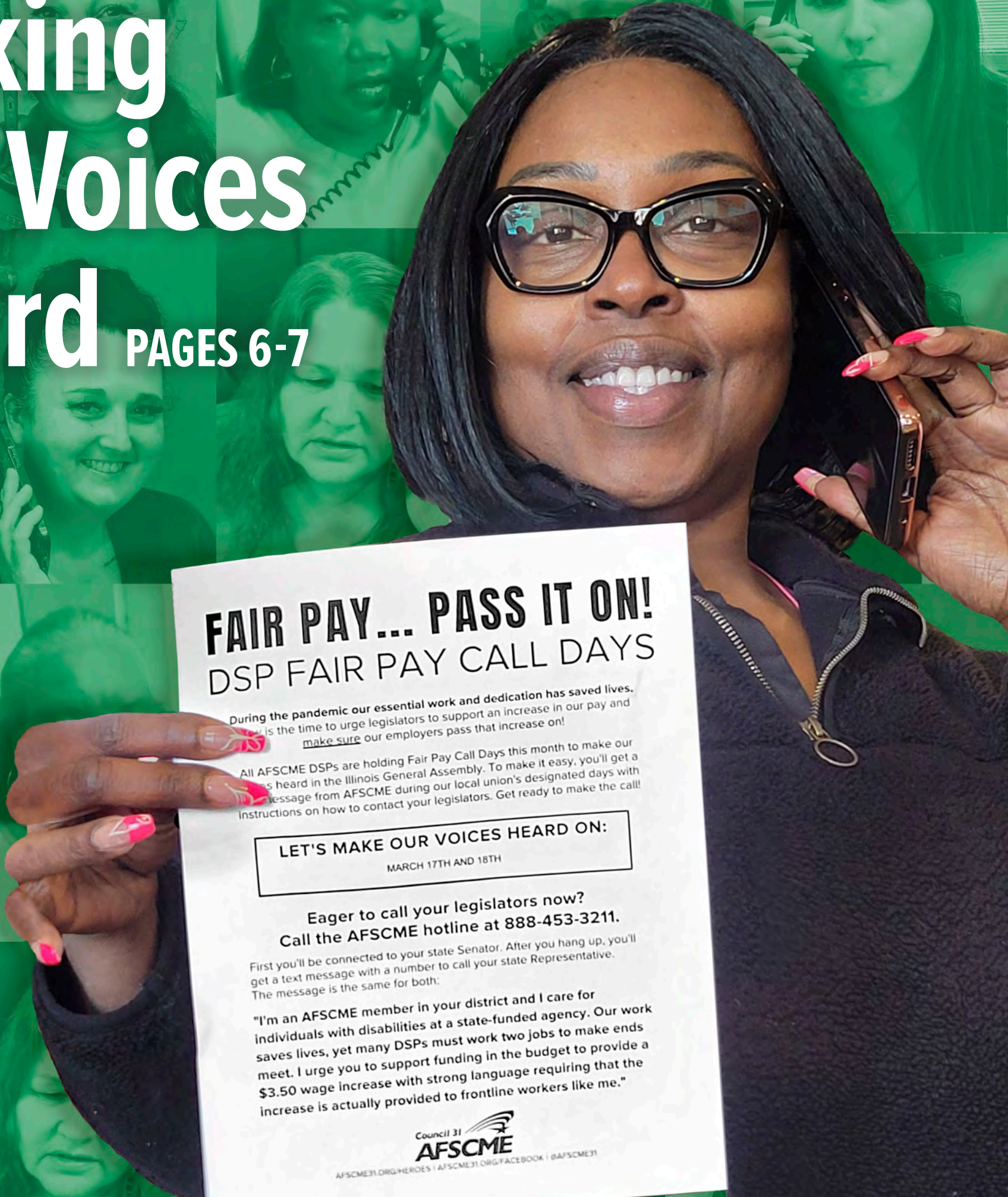


ON THE

MOVE

Making Our Voices Heard PAGES 6-7



FAIR PAY... PASS IT ON! DSP FAIR PAY CALL DAYS

During the pandemic our essential work and dedication has saved lives. It is the time to urge legislators to support an increase in our pay and make sure our employers pass that increase on!

All AFSCME DSPs are holding Fair Pay Call Days this month to make our voices heard in the Illinois General Assembly. To make it easy, you'll get a message from AFSCME during our local union's designated days with instructions on how to contact your legislators. Get ready to make the call!

LET'S MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD ON:
MARCH 17TH AND 18TH

**Eager to call your legislators now?
Call the AFSCME hotline at 888-453-3211.**

First you'll be connected to your state Senator. After you hang up, you'll get a text message with a number to call your state Representative. The message is the same for both:

"I'm an AFSCME member in your district and I care for individuals with disabilities at a state-funded agency. Our work saves lives, yet many DSPs must work two jobs to make ends meet. I urge you to support funding in the budget to provide a \$3.50 wage increase with strong language requiring that the increase is actually provided to frontline workers like me."



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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Vote YES for workers' rights

Protecting union rights is fundamental to our well-being



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

UNION RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

When we think of fundamental rights in our country, we may think of freedom of speech, or the right to vote, or freedom of the press. But we seldom think of collective bargaining.

That's a somewhat formal term for the right of workers to come together to advance their interests, and the obligation of employers to bargain with them rather than simply dictate their terms of employment.

The guarantee of a voice on the job should be fundamental and universal in a democratic nation like ours. But it is not. Although federal law does provide that right for workers in the private sector under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), far too few are able to exercise it. As the recent experience of workers in Amazon warehouses and Starbucks coffee shops powerfully demonstrates, workers seeking to have that voice through forming a union are all too often pressured, threatened, bullied, maligned, and sometimes flat-out fired.

A right that cannot be enforced is not really a right at all. And in the case of collective bargaining, the penalties for the kind of toxic anti-union tactics that employers use to block unions are next to nil.

In the public sector, the situation is better in some respects but far from ideal. In fact, millions of public employees in our country don't even have the nominal right to collective bargaining. Because public employees are excluded from coverage under the NLRA, state and local government workers have had to fight for that right on a state-by-state basis. Despite steady progress on that front over the course of six decades, public employees in more than two dozen states where anti-union forces control governorships or one or both houses of the state legislature still don't have that right today.

It wasn't until 1983 that we secured union rights for public

employees here in Illinois with the passage of the Illinois Public Employee Labor Relations Act. And what a difference that has made! In just 40 years, the lives of millions of teachers, state workers, municipal employees, and countless others have been transformed by having the legal right to collective bargaining—the power to ensure that our employers meet us as equals at the bargaining table.

Compared to states where public employees lack the fundamental right to collective bargaining, wage rates are higher in Illinois for nearly every type of public sector work.

The Illinois-Missouri pay gap underscores the union difference. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that “at least 200 Missouri residents cross the Mississippi River each day to work in Illinois government facilities where they can make a significantly larger paycheck for doing almost exactly the same job.”

Hursel King was earning \$26,000 a year as a correctional officer in Missouri until 2011, when he was hired for a similar post in Illinois that paid \$45,000. Now the treasurer of AFSCME Local 1175 at Menard Correctional Center, King told the Post-Dispatch that pay is the key reason he commutes 45 miles from his Missouri home.

“Obviously the union makes a big difference,” King said.

But collective bargaining rights are not just about wage gains—they are also about safety on the job, fair treatment, and the quality of services we provide. Sometimes these are gains we make in contract negotiations; sometimes they are the fruit of coming together through our PEOPLE program to push for change in the state legislature, city councils, or

county boards. And sometimes they are the result of collective action, an essential complement to collective bargaining, like picket lines, community outreach, or even a strike.

There is no doubt that Bruce Rauner would have succeeded in his goal of driving down the wages and benefits of public employees in Illinois if AFSCME and our partners in other unions hadn't brought the full force of our organized power to bear against him. Rauner's dream was to bring the low wages, poor benefits, and silenced voices that are the norm in states like Kentucky, Alabama, Tennessee and Missouri to Illinois by repealing our state's public employee collective bargaining law. But because we have built a powerful, unified force that can rise up to fight back when under attack, we effectively repealed Bruce Rauner.

Now there are other threats. The US Supreme Court's ruling in the Janus case that bars fair share fees has given rise to groups like the Freedom Foundation that try to lure employees away from union membership (see page 4). Republicans are seeking to gain a majority on the Illinois Supreme Court so they can overturn court rulings that affirmed the constitution's pension protection clause. And the forces of privatization continue to stalk city and county governments (page 10).

To combat these and many more challenges we know will come, the fundamental right to collective bargaining in our state must be protected. That's why our union is supporting the Workers' Rights Amendment to the Illinois constitution that will be on the ballot this November. Passage of this amendment would affirm this right and bar legislative action to abolish it.

Union rights are human rights. We're working every day to strengthen and expand them. Voting 'yes' for the Workers' Rights Amendment is one critical way to affirm just how fundamental collective bargaining is to our democracy.

AFSCME files unfair labor practice charge against IDOC

Department plans to downsize without bargaining



Last year the Illinois Department of Corrections notified AFSCME Council 31 of a far-reaching restructuring plan that would significantly impact operations at every prison across the state. AFSCME engaged in impact bargaining to prioritize safety and incorporate feedback from local unions at each facility.

At that time the department assured the union that no facility would be closed in its entirety and no staff layoffs or transfers would be required. But this February, without any warning to the union, employees, or offenders, the department began downsizing the medium security unit at Pontiac Correctional Center.

The initiative began with a massive blunder: Hundreds of offenders from Pontiac—some of them medically compromised—were loaded onto buses without following appropriate procedures for such

movement. They were transported to other facilities that were not prepared to receive them, requiring that they be moved again.

IDOC eventually acknowledged that this was just the start of changes planned for Pontiac, Vandalia, Lawrence and several other facilities. Within a matter of months, the department intended to downsize Pontiac and Vandalia by some 1,500 beds. None of these changes were consistent with the sweeping overhaul of departmental operations previously presented to the union

and refined through the collective bargaining process.

Not in good faith

AFSCME immediately made a demand to bargain over the impact of the new changes and pursuant to state law insisted that the status quo be preserved until such negotiations were concluded. In conjunction with the demand, the union made information requests

Director Eddie Caumiant pointed out that none of the information requested by the union had been provided. Moreover, after initially agreeing to freeze implementation of the plan pending the impact negotiations, last week the department once again began to move offenders out of the medium security unit at Pontiac.

Citing this movement as further indication that the

“AFSCME will continue to fight on all fronts to prevent facility closures and ensure safe working conditions.”

essential to being able to make sound judgments regarding the potential impact.

Bargaining pertaining to both closures is now underway, but in a letter sent to IDOC Director Rob Jeffreys in March, AFSCME Council 31 Regional

“employer is not really interested in bargaining in good faith,” Caumiant informed Jeffreys of the union’s intent to file an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge against the department, which AFSCME did on Friday, March 18.

Coalition building

AFSCME also reached out to area legislators to seek their help in preventing such large-scale cutbacks. In a letter to Governor JB Pritzker and Director Jeffreys, Reps. Thomas Bennett (R-Pontiac), Charlie Meier (R-Okawville), Paul Jacobs (R-Pomona), Patrick Windhorst (R-Metropolis) and Blaine Wilhour (R-Beecher City), as well as Sens. Jason Plummer (R-Edwardsville), Jason Barickman (R-Bloomington) and Terri Bryant (R-Murphysboro) voiced their concern.

“(T)here is significant concern in these communities about the future of those facilities,” the letter stated. “As both of these correctional centers serve as some of the largest employers in their respective regions, any changes to staffing or inmate population levels would have a major impact on the economic health of those areas.”

Vandalia Mayor Ricky Gottman agreed. “[DOC] is an important employer in the area. And that makes it an important part of our economy... These are good ... jobs and it would be devastating to lose them.”

AFSCME members stand united and won’t stop pushing for the best possible outcomes for the correctional system.

“AFSCME will continue to fight on all fronts to prevent facility closures and ensure safe working conditions,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said in a letter to members. “The surest path to winning is the unity and solidarity in our ranks. If we continue to stand together, we will continue to move forward together.”

COMMISSARY TROUBLES CONTINUE

Correctional security was further undermined when DOC management abruptly decided to restructure its commissary operations. The result was widespread frustration and discontent among individuals in custody, leading to increased tensions inside the facilities.

The commissary has always been an important element in maintaining morale and order—and thus safety—in the correctional system. For persons in custody, it’s both a necessary benefit for a diverse array of interests and needs and a relief from bad prison meals. For staff, the employee commissary provides the opportunity to

purchase healthier meal choices than those available inside the prison walls. But recently, claiming that an internal audit finding “required” the department to move to a single source, IDOC designated a company called Keefe as the statewide contractor, with problematic consequences like shortages and poor-quality products.

Joining local businesses and inmate advocates in decrying the new system, AFSCME helped to push the department to develop an interim plan with a larger number of vendors. Now the union has enlisted legislators to help solve the problem on a permanent basis.

After meeting with AFSCME members, Rep. Lance Yednock and Senator Doris Turner initiated a letter to IDOC Director Jeffreys that was eventually signed by more than 40 legislators. “[S]evere shortages at a number of facilities are contributing to frustration, even anger, among incarcerated individuals,” they wrote. “There is no doubt that functional commissaries are an integral part of safe, secure and less violent facilities.”

To date, neither AFSCME nor the legislators have received a response from IDOC as to a viable plan to address the commissary situation.

Freedom Foundation— get the facts

Some Illinois AFSCME members have received mailers at their homes or email at their work email addresses from the so-called "Freedom Foundation," also known as "Opt Out Today."

The Freedom Foundation is a West Coast front group whose self-described mission is "bankrupting and defeating government unions."

"If the Freedom Foundation name sounds familiar, it's because this is the same billionaire-funded group that was behind the Janus v. AFSCME Council 31 case in 2018," said AFSCME International President Lee Saunders. "They seek to destroy workers' rights and derail labor unions while taking away workers' freedom to demand a voice on the job and a seat at the table in the workplace."

Although the mailers claim they want to help union members, their real agenda is to spread misinformation and distortions about AFSCME to try to push members to drop out of their union. If they can weaken public sector unions,

workers won't be able to collectively fight to protect pensions, to raise wages, or to improve benefits.

Keeping workers down

"They want to take away the power we have at the table," said AFSCME Local 2912 President Susan Littlefield, who works at the city of Chicago. "It's important to stay united against the attacks because they're not going away. They're trying to take what we have away from us."

"These groups are funded in the shadows by people who want to destroy the only source of organized power for workers in our country, our unions," Lynch said. "They want to further consolidate power at the top and make sure that the rest of us don't have a chance to



AFSCME Local 2912 President Susan Littlefield



"They want to take away the power we have at the table."

have our voices heard."

The Freedom Foundation/Opt Out Today is known for invading public employees' privacy with harassment by mail, email, phone, text, and web ads at home or work. It's happening across the country.

Two special education teachers in Cleveland wrote an op-ed this March calling out "a deceptive pattern" in the Freedom Foundation's mailings to union members like them: "They refer to the union as

a third party that takes our money, when a union is inseparable from the membership. We are the union; we elect union leadership, and we pay dues because those resources keep our union functioning."


Junk mail warning

"These mailers have been coming ever since they did the Janus case, and maybe a month ago, one message

popped across our city of Joliet emails," AFSCME Local 440 President David Gornick said. "They made it look almost like it was from AFSCME, but if you read it you realized, this ain't AFSCME."

Gornick talked to the city manager and was able to block the offender from sending emails through the city's servers. "Our local is 100% union and they don't fall for it. We know that they're just trying to break our union."

"Be on the lookout for any harassing communications from the Freedom Foundation or Opt Out Today," Lynch said. "If you receive anything, let your local union and Council 31 know right away—and dump them in the trash. We'll let the Freedom Foundation know that we won't be pushed around, and we won't be fooled. It won't work because we're 100% union, AFSCME Strong."

"Let's stay focused on why the Freedom Foundation is angry that we have a union, like fair pay, affordable health care, a secure retirement and a voice on the job," Littlefield said. "We can't get complacent because it can all be taken away." 

CGH Medical Center broke state labor law, judge rules

CGH Medical Center violated state labor law by posting on its website a letter from CEO Paul Steinke that instructed workers how to revoke their union membership.

That's according to a recommended decision issued late March by an administrative law judge of the Illinois Labor Relations Board.

The web posting of Steinke's letter was an illegal attempt to "interfere with, restrain, coerce, deter, and/or discourage employees from becoming or remaining members of a labor organization," the decision says.


"Steinke's continued pattern of anti-worker hostilities is particularly offensive given the pandemic that has called CGH healthcare workers to go above and beyond to care for their community," Council 31

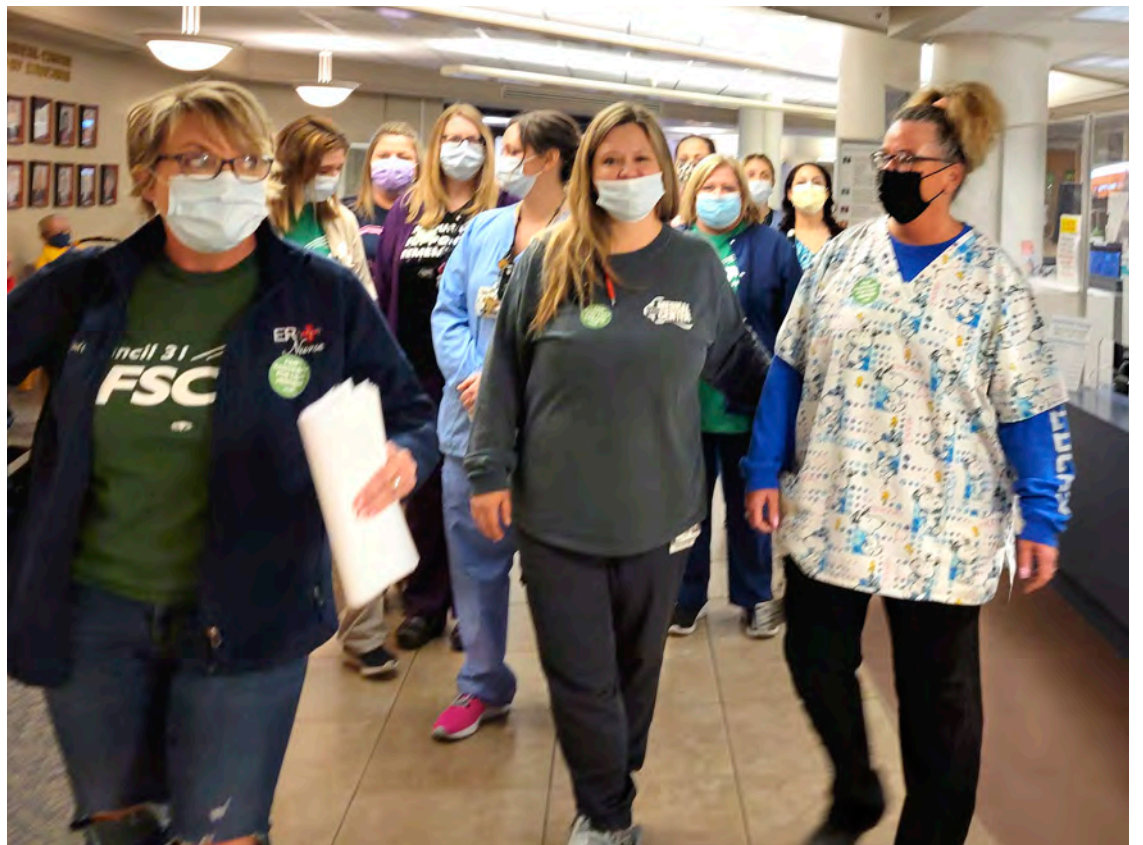
Regional Director Doug Woodson said.

CGH employees overcame management's relentless two-year anti-union campaign to form a union with AFSCME, which was certified in April 2021. Some 850 registered nurses (RNs), certified nurse assistants (CNAs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), phlebotomists, medical assistants, and other health care workers in the CGH system are still striving for their first union contract at the bargaining table, where management is resisting employees' proposals that would improve pay, benefits, staffing levels and patient care.

One proposal is for CGH to restore personal paid time off used by employees who

contracted COVID-19 on the job. More than 350 employees signed a petition urging Steinke to restore that time by using a small portion of the nearly \$15 million in federal aid the hospital received to address pandemic-related costs. But when the workers delivered the petition on March 29, Steinke turned his back on them and walked away, refusing

to even listen to their concerns. CGH and CEO Steinke face four more unfair labor practice charges filed in 2019. Those charges relate to a pattern of abuse and intimidation by CGH management during employees' union organizing drive; they have been heard by an administrative law judge whose decision is pending. 



Union contract helps friend save a life

Provides vital aid for living donor kidney chain

The AFSCME state employee bargaining committee secured a new benefit in the 2000-2004 collective bargaining agreement with the state of Illinois. More than 20 years later, that benefit enabled one union member to save another's life.

Marilyn Fernandez and Tam Chavez have been friends and volleyball teammates for 15 years. They met through Marilyn's boyfriend; all three were AFSCME members working for the state. Marilyn is a human services caseworker at DHS and Tam is a public guardian for individuals with disabilities.

A few years ago, Marilyn went to the hospital with heart palpitations. After six months of tests, doctors diagnosed her with end-stage renal failure. She needed a kidney transplant or would be forced to go on dialysis.

Dialysis treats kidney failure but does not cure it. Patients with successful kidney transplants live longer and have a better quality of life. For someone as young and otherwise healthy as Marilyn, dialysis would be a major blow. Although she was placed on the kidney transplant list, the wait can be very long; Marilyn's doctor said her best chance was to find a living kidney donor.

Stepping up

Marilyn first looked to her family members but couldn't find a match. She widened her search to friends, even reaching out on social media. That's when Tam learned her friend was in need. They talked about the process at volleyball practice and Tam went home and took the first step, filling out a lengthy questionnaire.

"Within 24 hours, they notified me that they had a potential match and wanted to go forward with screening," Marilyn recalled. It was an exciting time, but brief. Marilyn was placed on the list in January 2020; Tam was found to be a match in February. Then COVID hit in March.

"COVID slowed everything down, probably a good six to eight months," Marilyn said. In the meantime, Tam had to figure out how to make everything work on her end. Recovery from the kidney donor surgery can take up to six weeks. She would need to use up her sick time to make ends meet for her family.

Then Marilyn called with some good news. The union contract provided the answer.

Covered by contract

Marilyn was pouring through documents to see how she could help make this process easier for Tam. Finally, she came across section 13 in AFSCME's collective bargaining agreement with the state: "The employer shall grant up to six (6) weeks of leave with pay for living donors of organs including, but not limited to, kidneys, bone marrow, or any other organ that may be transplanted."

"I didn't realize we had this benefit until Marilyn told me about it," Tam said. "It's really great because it's one less thing for donors to worry about. It's a legitimate reason to be concerned because not everyone can take that time off and the recipient doesn't want to be a financial burden on the donor."

Former Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer led negotiations for the contract where this benefit originated. Like many benefits won by the union, he said, it started with a member submitting the language for adoption by the

"With our contract, we're covered on all the things that people worry most about."

bargaining committee—likely because they wanted to donate or had already made a donation. "Proposals like this are a reminder of the advantages of a large, representative rank-and-file committee," Bayer said.

Chain of generosity

The story wasn't over yet. Just one week before the surgery, Marilyn got a call from her surgeon.

"They had found another donor who was 10 years



AFSCME members Marilyn Fernandez and Tam Chavez prepare for their kidney transplant surgery. Their union contract helped make the life-saving measure possible.

younger and was a closer medical match for me," Marilyn said. "It turns out the father of

match for you, I'll do it.' I was overwhelmed."

"Reducing her chances of rejection was the priority for me," Tam said. "Plus, I told her, now she gets a younger kidney."

Spreading the word

The transplant surgeries took place on June 17, 2021. Both Marilyn and Tam are recovering well, and Marilyn's new kidney has given her back her energy. They're both grateful for that, and grateful they had a union contract to help make it happen.

"It's a great benefit that we have," Marilyn said. "I don't know that a lot of people know of the benefit, and I want to spread the word."

She was also floored by her insurance coverage. "The way that the transplants work is

the recipient's insurance covers everything for the donor. So I got the bill for both of us and it was about \$250,000," she said. "But we have really great insurance through our union contract and all I've paid is my co-pays for the doctor visits and hospital stay."

"Having a union contract gives you peace of mind in situations like this," Tam said. "Knowing that you have a job to come back to and you won't be financially burdened by doing this for a loved one."

"The protection our contract gave us was huge," Marilyn agreed. "I was able to take three months off of work, I had peace of mind knowing Tam was taken care of, and I knew that my insurance was covering all of it. Everything worked out amazingly well because with our contract, we're covered on all the things that people worry most about." 

AFSCME makes gains in abbreviated legislative session

Improvements made on wages, rights and protections for workers



The Illinois General Assembly gathered in Springfield—and on Zoom—for a truncated, hybrid 2022 legislative session—a result of both the pandemic and a change in the primary election schedule.

AFSCME's lobbying team at the State Capitol was working double-time throughout the session to ensure progress for union members and protect and expand workers' rights.

Before adjourning on April 9 (after working through the previous night), legislators adopted an FY 23 budget that averts cutbacks and provides an array of tax breaks, several which will benefit working families. There are increases in funding for some state agencies, as well as state universities.

WHAT WE WON

Improving Safety for DCFS Employees

In the wake of the brutal murder of DCFS investigator Deidre Silas in January, AFSCME was able to overcome opposition from the ACLU and the NASW to pass legislation (SB 1486) that authorizes investigators to carry personal protection spray devices, such as mace or pepper gas, for self-defense purposes, provided proper training is made available. Passed both

houses and awaiting action by the governor.

Health Insurance for Survivors

AFSCME worked with Sen. Doris Turner and the Pritzker Administration to develop legislation (SB 3197) that will provide health insurance coverage for the families of any state employee or university employee who is killed in the line of duty. Surviving

family members will be able to continue on the state's group insurance with the state covering 100% of the premium. Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.

COVID time for educational employees

Along with the teachers' unions, AFSCME championed legislation to provide paid time off for school district and university

employees for COVID-related absences. The bill originally passed in the prior legislative session, but Gov. Pritzker vetoed it because it did not restrict the time-off benefit to vaccinated employees—and there were not enough votes to override his veto.

A compromise measure (HB 1167) passed in this session that allows paid time off for vaccinated employees—without use of benefit time—if the employee or their child is quarantined due to COVID. It also retroactively restores any personal paid time off used for COVID-related absences and provides paycheck protection for school district employees in the event of any future COVID-related closures. Governor Pritzker has signed this bill into law.

Federal coverage expanded for correctional employees

In the final hours of the legislative session in Springfield, things were moving at a rapid-fire pace. AFSCME's lobbying team worked with legislators who introduced an amendment that would extend coverage under the Federal Law Enforcement Officers' Safety Act (LEOSA) to Illinois state and county correctional officers.

LEOSA exempts active and retired law enforcement officers from local or state prohibitions on carrying of concealed weapons, and the amendment proposed extending that exemption to all state and county correctional officers in Illinois.

After an urgent call to action, AFSCME members generated hundreds of calls in support of the amendment in just a few hours. Despite opposition from the Illinois Department of Corrections, the measure passed the General Assembly and was sent to the governor's desk.

Service weapon and badge

Another bill that passed out of the General Assembly, backed by AFSCME, allows any correctional officer, probation officer, parole agent, gaming board agent, revenue agent or other correctional employees who are currently issued a badge or service weapon to purchase a retirement badge or weapon should they meet certain criteria.

Retirement security – The final approved budget includes

After an urgent call to action, AFSCME members generated hundreds of calls in support of the amendment in just a few hours. It passed the General Assembly.

a big win for retirement security for public employees. Gov. Pritzker included an additional \$500 million pension debt payment in his budget proposal and the General Assembly's budget preserves that payment. AFSCME retirees worked hard to help retain this fiscally responsible measure, generating hundreds of calls to lawmakers and holding a press conference on the issue (see page 15).

Finally, AFSCME members working as gaming board and revenue agents saw improvements to their retirement. Their retirement age is lowered, and a window was created for agents to convert service credit earned under the regular formula to the alternative formula, as well as up to five years of service under the IMRF earned performing police duties.

Protecting the vulnerable

– The budget includes significant nursing home funding reform that will ensure allocated monies are used for wage increases for CNAs and nurses as intended. State rate reimbursements will now incentivize investments in staffing and wages by directing funds toward providers with better staffing levels and patient safety measures. The budget also allocates new, additional funds for nursing homes—65% of which is slated to go directly to workers.

Union rights codified – The labor movement won legislative approval for clear and accurate ballot language for the Workers' Rights Amendment, which will be on the general election ballot this November.

The ballot language will read as follows: *The proposed amendment would add a new section to the Bill of Rights Article of the Illinois Constitution that would guarantee workers the fundamental right to organize and to bargain collectively and to negotiate wages, hours, and working conditions, and to promote their economic welfare and safety at work. It would also prohibit from being passed any law that interferes with, negates, or diminishes the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively over their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment and workplace safety. At the general election to be held on November 8, 2022, you will be called upon to decide whether the proposed*

amendment should become part of the Illinois Constitution.

BLOCKED

Pension attack – AFSCME successfully blocked from consideration Sen. Darren Bailey's proposed constitutional amendment to repeal protection of public pension benefits. The bill would have provided unlimited power to the General Assembly to reduce or change pension benefits of any participants in local or state public pension programs or public retirement systems.

KEEP ON FIGHTING

Retirement age – AFSCME's lobbying team also laid the groundwork for lowering retirement age for IDOC employees. Legislators were pushing to lower the SERS retirement age for Illinois State Police to strengthen recruitment. AFSCME argued that any such measure should also include correctional employees who participate in SERS. Unfortunately, the final bill did not include those employees,

but legislators like Sen. Terri Bryant and Rep. Dave Vella pledged to develop such legislation in the future. AFSCME will continue to press for that expansion.

Summer unemployment

– AFSCME lobbied to renew legislation passed in 2021 that had temporarily provided access to unemployment benefits when non-instructional school district or university employees are laid off without pay over the summer months. However, stiff opposition from employers combined with a

severely underfunded unemployment trust fund stymied passage of this measure.

Enhanced penalties – To further address assaults against DCFS employees, AFSCME sought to amend the Criminal Code to provide that a person who knowingly causes great bodily harm or permanent disability or disfigurement to a DCFS employee also commits aggravated battery—with the penalty a Class 1 felony. The measure passed out of the Senate but stalled in the House.



Progress made on fairer wages for DSPs

Over the past five budget cycles, Illinois has increased funding for community disability services by 52%. Because of AFSCME's efforts, direct support professionals (DSPs) and other frontline employees at these state-funded agencies have seen their wages go up an average of more than \$5 per hour.

But starting wages remain barely above minimum wage in many agencies, turnover is often 50% or more and vacancies are staggeringly high.

"We are so understaffed because of our low pay," said AFSCME Local 1555 member Jen Zinke, who made calls to her legislators with her baby Maevyn on her lap (see photo). "Some of us need to work two jobs or work a lot of overtime to make ends meet. [With higher wages], staff wouldn't be so burned out after all the long hours. And with more staff, the clients would be able to have more one-on-one attention."

This disparity is exacerbated by the fact that even when the state provides funding for DSP wage increases, it has not always required community agencies to pass the wage increases through to workers.

In this session, AFSCME advocated a \$3.50 increase for frontline personnel to meet the Guidehouse study

recommendations commissioned by the state in 2018 to bring Illinois in compliance with the State's Ligas consent decree and to keep pace with new minimum and living wage levels.

In the end, the budget includes a \$1.00 wage increase for these frontline workers, the amount proposed in Gov. Pritzker's budget. While the wage amount isn't as high as it should be, AFSCME's lobbying efforts did secure legislative language that requires that all these funds do in fact go toward base wages for frontline workers. In addition, AFSCME also succeeded in passing legislation that will require employers to certify their compliance.

A vigorous grassroots lobbying effort by AFSCME members at community disability agency helped to put this issue front and center before lawmakers. A contingent traveled to Springfield on March 9 to urge support for higher wages in person.



AFSCME members Marilyn Fernandez and Tam Chavez prepare for their kidney transplant surgery. Their union contract helped make the life-saving measure possible.

"We're here to lobby for the raises that we rightfully deserve," said AFSCME Local 3492 member Emma Lane. "We're here to ask for them to pass the raise for us that we so, so much deserve and need. I'm proud to be here."

Working together with lawmakers and the union's lobbying team, AFSCME members

helped push these measures over the line.

"The measures that we're putting in place are about ensuring that you get the pay that you deserve for the work that you're doing," said Rep. Lakesia Collins. "Your work is not going unheard. We hear you. We see you. We value you. And we thank you for all that you do."





CHICAGO WORKS BECAUSE

AFSCME MEMBERS DO THE WORK that makes Chicago happen. Represented by six local unions, some 3,500 union members live in the city and provide critical public services that help to ensure the health and safety of everyone living, working and visiting in the city. From fighting the pandemic to keeping food and water safe to helping the homeless and protecting the elderly, AFSCME members work in an array of jobs that serve the people of Chicago.

These dedicated workers kept the city open and safe throughout the pandemic and they're still getting the job done every day. Now their union contract is up for renewal and AFSCME Locals 505, 654, 1215, 1669, 2912 and 2946 are standing together to fight for fair wages and benefits to provide for themselves and their families and to build a better future. In the process, they are planning to remind Chicago residents of the vital, but often unseen, work they do every day.



JANINE DELGADO

Janine Delgado, Animal Care Clerk Commission on Animal Care and Control, Local 2912

Animal care clerks are the first people residents interact with when coming to animal control. We do intakes, adoptions, redemptions, vaccinations, and clean and set up cages for animals in our care. My favorite part of the job is the redemptions and adoptions. When someone comes to find their lost pet, it's always fun to see how happy the animals get. And with adoptions, seeing how happy the family is.

We're open 365 days a year and we didn't close for COVID. We help provide residents the tools they need to keep their pets safe at home and in the community. We reunite families with lost pets and connect them

with new pets, we protect animals from cruelty and neglect, and we educate the public about pet ownership.

I've become more involved in the union to stand up for part-time clerks like me. In 2017, having a union helped us win sick pay for part-timers. Through our union, we will continue to fight for better conditions for part-timers.

Ciprian Hosu, Water Chemist II Department of Water Management, Local 2946

Water chemists and filtration engineers work in tandem to test the water from the intake from Lake Michigan to the time the water is distributed to city residents. We're the last barrier to test the safety of the water and we ensure the public gets the best possible drinking water.

I think having a union gives us a sense of safety;



CIPRIAN HOSU



KHALIL MUHAMMAD

water going out to the public to drink and use

Khalil Muhammad Management Co Office of Emergency M Communications, Local

At the OEMC, we are responsible for planning, training and management like natural scale events. We are the liaison between police, hospitals, transportation, being abreast of what's best practices and learn how we can improve our planning.

We're always out there to make sure you have happy streets are still open people were checking people. During the pandemic city's COVID response



CAUSE WE DO!

somebody is looking out for you, your safety and benefits. They'll stand up and fight for you. Coming from Florida, a nonunion state, it's something that I didn't have there.

The price of goods and housing increase, they don't stay static. So why should our wages be static? People here work around the clock. It would be nice to be compensated for the sacrifices we make—missing children's birthdays, spending time with our families—to ensure the

city is safe and enjoyable for the

ad, Senior Emergency Coordinator Management & Local 654, President

responsible for preparedness exercises around emergency disasters, terrorism, and large-scale coordinating agency, the fire, the Red Cross, park district, and more. We keep you safe by what's going on in the world, considering learning from others' mistakes so we can be prepared.

helping in the worst times to housing, your water is working, open. During the 2011 blizzard, our cars on Lake Shore Drive to help pandemic, we were coordinating the

AFSCME Local 654 is the public safety local in the city. Our members work at police stations, at 311, and we also help ensure police accountability. We never stop because we are essential to the running and operation of the city of Chicago. Where some people were told to stay home at the start of this pandemic, that was not an option for us.

Corina Pedraza, Children's Library Associate

Chicago Public Library Local 1215, Executive Board Member

At the Back of the Yards branch, we provide essential, traditional library services, like children's story time, but we also do so much more. For instance, we have a special media space for teens so they can be creative and explore personal interests.

We're very rooted in our community. Staff members are active in different community coalitions, we partner with a lot of community organizations, elected officials, schools and hospitals to put on big events. We have a strong commitment from staff to work hard and push the boundaries on what public library spaces can be. It's not just about getting a library card and taking out books.

With a union, we're able to do our work with confidence because we understand the rights we have and the power that we have. We can raise concerns without fear. We wouldn't have that without a union. We cannot harness our strength and power unless we recognize that the union is all of us, every single person.



CORINA PEDRAZA

Deeana Mendoza, Sanitarian II Department of Health & Public Works Local 505 Recording Secretary & Steward

Our team ensures food safety at all of the restaurants, nursing homes, day cares, hospitals, schools, gas stations, food trucks, festivals and sports facilities within the city. We inspect for various violations ranging from minor to imminent health hazards. We're out in the field every day conducting inspections at over 16,000 Chicago establishments, from the northwest corner to the southeast and everything in between. We're responsible for all of them.



DEEANA MENDOZA

Prevention is key. We try to prevent health hazards before they happen. Statistically, our team stops a food-borne illness two weeks before it even happens. Our critical thinking skills really have to be on point. Not only are we enforcers, we're educators, teaching how to do things the right way. I really take pride in being part of a union. My top priority is that our team is as safe as possible while we're protecting public health and the solidarity in AFSCME helps keep us safe.

Denise Williams, Support Services Coordinator Department of Family & Support Services Local 1669, President

Working in the homeless services division, my job includes taking and following up on shelter complaints, reviewing grant contracts of city-funded homeless shelters and making sure the clients are being treated fairly and live in clean, decent shelters. No matter what your economic status, you should receive quality care. I want to be the person who ensures that. That's the great part of my job.

There are numerous family shelters, men's shelters, women's shelters, and youth shelters. There has been more need for family shelters lately because rent and utilities have increased, and it's hard for people

to make ends meet. People have the misconception that homeless individuals don't want to work and are lazy. That is so not the case. People at emergency shelters have jobs, but they can't afford market rents, or something catastrophic happened to them. We are the conduit joining people and agencies and resources together to connect people to the right services. We're helping people's quality of life improve.

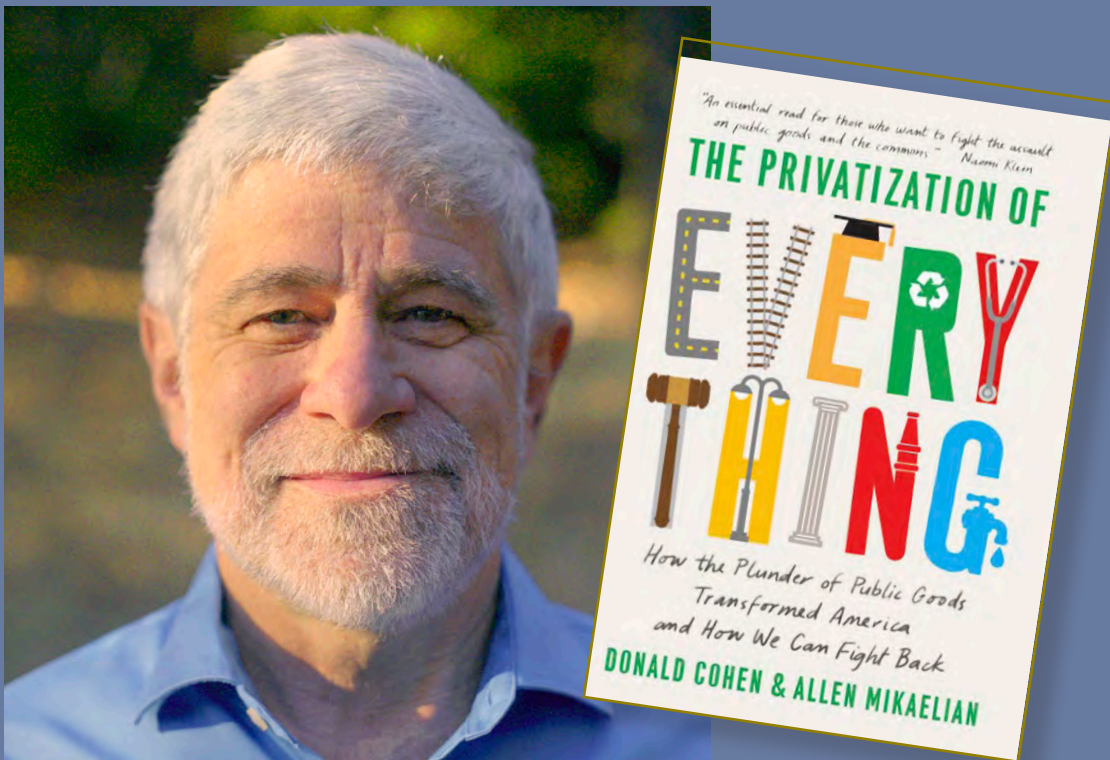


DENISE WILLIAMS

The Privatization of Everything

New book points to perils of outsourcing public services

YOU CAN'T HAVE HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES WITHOUT WELL-RESPECTED AND WELL-PAID WORKERS.



*On The Move spoke with Donald Cohen, executive director of In The Public Interest and co-author of the new book, *The Privatization of Everything: How the Plunder of Public Goods Transformed America and How We Can Fight Back*. In The Public Interest is a national organization that works with unions, community groups and policymakers to fight privatization of public goods and services and to expand access to high-quality public services.*

I think we generally understand privatization to mean that public services are contracted out or sold. But in your book you argue that it's more than that.

It's private control over public goods. What I mean by public goods are those things that we all need to survive and thrive, that we need everyone to have: education, health, safety, clean environment, access to college, the whole set of things.

Private interests get control through outsourcing and privatizing. They get control when there's not enough public money, after tax-cutting for years, to provide these basic things. And they get control when we don't regulate or monitor private actors enough.

Privatization might appeal to some politicians because it generally drives down wages and benefits. That's bad for workers. But why is privatization so harmful to the communities we serve?

When they say they're going to spend less money on a service, we have to ask what they're going to spend less money on. It's often the number of workers, and the wages and benefits of workers, but it can be other things. It can be the quality of the food in the prison. That happened in Michigan and Ohio, when they found maggots in it. Or when Iowa privatized their Medicaid, people got less health care. It's pretty simple: They're going to spend less money on something that we want them not to spend less money on. You can't have high-quality services without well-respected and well-paid workers.

One example you discuss in the book that's particularly familiar is the sale of the parking meters in Chicago. How does that particular boondoggle illustrate the perils of privatization?

It is the first story I tell in every one of the talks that I've done, because it's really illustrative. It's a terrible deal. Chicago has guaranteed revenue

to the parking meter consortium, which limits the city's ability to do things it might want to do like bus rapid transit or bike lanes or pedestrian zones [if those things would reduce parking revenue]. That's an assault on democracy. That's a straitjacket on the ability for the elected leaders of the city to do their job. And it's until 2083.

What's one of the more surprising examples of privatization that you've encountered?

The weather. The data for our weather apps—and weather on TV and the internet—is created by the National Weather Service and paid for with tax money. But companies like Accuweather have used their political power to prevent the National Weather Service from being able to provide free apps and data directly to the public. The same thing is true with taxes. TurboTax and others use their power to make it impossible for the IRS to provide free and easy tax filing. They won't let it happen because they don't want the competition.


A familiar threat for our members here in Illinois today is from companies that prey on municipalities—cities, counties—and try to buy off their water systems. Are you seeing this around the country?

Yes. Companies walk in with pretty pictures of a new water plant and a slogan saying, 'We can do it cheaper, we can do it better, we can do it faster—and you don't have to raise taxes.' How are they going to do it? Higher water rates. They charge more.

What role can public service workers play together through our unions to prevent privatization?

Everybody I know that works in government really wants to do something good for their community and they're proud of their work. Public sector workers—of which there are 20 million in the U.S.—need to be an army for talking about what public institutions do for the public. Not just on TV but in our neighborhoods, in our churches, in our Little League teams, like, "Hey, this is what I do. This is how I help people." It's crucially important.

Community members need to be talking about that too. We need many voices saying the quality of the service is important and the people who provide it need to be well-respected.

Always pay careful attention. If you hear a rumor that something might get outsourced, or see a consultant in the office, get out ahead of it. If there is scrutiny, you can ask a whole lot of questions in advance. And all of a sudden the "cheaper, better, faster" pretty pictures start to evaporate. 

ISU employees win fair contract, avert strike

On the verge of a strike, AFSCME Local 1110 bargaining committee reached a tentative agreement with Illinois State University that advances the goals the union has been trying so hard to achieve at the bargaining table.

Instead of the planned strike, the union was set to hold a contract ratification meeting as *On the Move* went to press.

AFSCME Local 1110 represents more than 300 buildings, grounds and food services employees at Illinois State University. ISU students and faculty count on these workers to prepare food, wash dishes and floors, clean restrooms and classrooms, shovel snow, maintain the Quad and more.

The union contract expired last June. Despite having given out big raises and bonuses to upper management, wages for frontline employees are lower than comparable positions at other state universities and most other public sector employers in the area.

After more than 20 negotiating sessions over six months failed to produce sufficient progress, an overwhelming

96% of the membership voted to authorize a strike. But the university still wouldn't budge at the table. The bargaining committee had no choice but to file a strike notice with the state Educational Labor Relations Board on April 7.

On April 9, hundreds rallied and marched across campus in a strike countdown, calling for a fair contract.

"It is the fundamental moment that you have come to when you are prepared to stand up and say to this university, 'see us,' Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said of the strike vote when speaking to the crowd at the rally. "We are not going to go quietly into any dark night; we are going to stand up in the daylight."

The last day of bargaining went on for more than seven hours before an agreement was reached. By the end of the day an


exhausted but determined bargaining committee was finally able to shake hands across the table with management.

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nesler and Regional Director Carla Gillespie, the committee included Local 1110 President Chuck Carver, Kevin Cagle, Jon Fears, Jeff Powell and Tia Reece.

"We are deeply appreciative of the outpouring of support that we received from students, faculty and members of other on-campus unions, which was so essential to our ability to achieve this agreement," said Carver.

"I think we can call this a win for all AFSCME," said Reece. "It really did take our

whole union family and the village to get here."

"The determination and unity of these dedicated ISU employees has resulted in a tentative agreement that will make ISU not only a good place to learn, but a better place to work," Lynch said. "That's the power of collective bargaining for the greater good." 



AFSCME members Marilyn Fernandez and Tam Chavez prepare for their kidney transplant surgery.

Northern Illinois nursing homes under attack

Public nursing homes are the backbone of many communities—assuring quality care for those most in need. But private companies are steadily chipping away at these vital community resources.

When nursing homes are privatized, "money goes for profits, for high CEO salaries, debt service, for buying other companies, for lobbying and campaign contributions," says privatization expert Donald Cohen. "Every one of those dollars is not being used to provide services. The horrible thing is, cutting corners there means worse living conditions for people in nursing homes, lower-paid professionals, fewer workers, lower staff-to-resident ratios."

Privatization and closures have claimed all but 15

county-owned nursing homes in Illinois. Three that remain are threatened now.

Stephenson County

For two years the members of AFSCME Local 2399 and their allies have successfully fought off schemes to sell Freeport-based Walnut Acres. Most recently, politicians pushing a sale manipulated the home's financial outlook to make it appear broke, then used the artificial mini-crisis to advance through a county board

committee plans to either sell or shutter it.

That's when the Save Walnut Acres coalition mobilized once again, generating phone calls to board members, rallying outside the county courthouse, and packing the board meeting with supporters, family members of residents, and union members clad in AFSCME green.

of closure for now," Council 31 Regional Director Doug Woodson said, "but Stephenson County still has an RFP for brokerage firms, so the threat of sale isn't over. Our coalition will stay ready to spring back into action, and if needed will work to defeat those board members who are interested in selling at the ballot box."

Winnebago County


Voters in the upcoming primary election will be asked whether an increase in the property tax levy should support the county's River Bluff Nursing Home in Rockford.

more than thirty years.

Although the referendum is advisory, not binding, its passage would make clear to county board members that voters value the public nursing home and are willing to fund it. On the flip side, a potential defeat would surely encourage the forces of privatization on the board and behind the scenes.

Dekalb County

Capitalizing on past management problems and financial difficulties, a brokerage firm that profits from nursing home sales has been trying to convince county board members to sell the DeKalb County Nursing & Rehab Center that employs members of AFSCME Local 3537.

The board recently refused to put before voters an advisory referendum like the one pending in Winnebago County. The union continues to make clear that selling the home would jeopardize the future of affordable long-term care in the DeKalb area, as well as the jobs, wages and benefits of AFSCME members who provide it. 

"Cutting corners means worse living conditions for people in nursing homes."

Rattled, the board voted 19-1 against the closure. That gives the company recently brought in to fix the home's billing practices more time to do its job.

"We defeated the threat

AFSCME Local 473 members are gearing up to campaign for a strong Yes vote.

The very modest increase would cost just \$25 a year for a home worth \$150,000. The levy has not been increased for

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME Local 3182 members at the Lake County Circuit Clerk's Office after electing their new executive board.

Major gains for Lake County clerks

NEARLY 100 CIRCUIT COURT clerks and trainers at the Lake County Circuit Clerk's Office secured more than 20% in wage increases over the life of their second-ever union contract as part of AFSCME Local 3182.

"When we began bargaining in 2016, the starting wage was \$12.71 an hour. We've been working to raise wages in order to attract and retain employees," said Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis, who led negotiations for the union. "The pandemic made it even clearer that the wage rates still needed to be higher. The clerk's office was suffering from significant vacancy rates because they couldn't get people to apply."

Made up of newly elected President Cori Solis, Sandra Lucio, Sarah Podborny and Kathy Rhey, the bargaining team was able to make big strides at the table.

"Everybody wanted to know if we would be able to secure a good pay increase," said Solis, a court services specialist. "We were able to get a nice package to bring back to them. With the economy the way that it is, it was great to see what we were able to accomplish on our next paycheck."

The team secured a total of 15.5% in raises retroactive to June 1, 2021. It was phased in by steps over that year. An additional 5% in raises will be accrued for the next two years—more, if nonunion positions receive higher raises—with the contract expiring in November 2024.

"It was my first time at the table," Solis said. "I didn't realize how much back-and-forth there was, and now we have a better appreciation of what it takes. You see things differently after you've been to one of the bargaining sessions, I wish everyone could see it."

Big improvements in Dekalb County

IN DEKALB COUNTY, AFSCME Local 3537 members won a new union contract that raises wages, increases stipends for clothing, on-call and bilingual pay, improves contract language across the board and provides an unprecedented increase in longevity pay.

Recording Secretary Chris Klein said the team's success at the table was because they did their homework and had input from members in various

departments to back up their proposals.

"We need all members to play a role in being the change they'd like to see," Klein said. "The success of these negotiations underscores the relationship between members working together toward a goal and getting great results."

Klein also said that a change in county administration made a big difference. The new administrator considers county employees as a valued asset, she said, and promised to continue making improvements.

The bargaining team negotiated a labor-management committee to undertake a job study to assess wages and benefits as the minimum wage continues to rise and evaluate roles and responsibilities.

"The last job study was done more than 30 years ago," Klein said. "Employees are doing a whole heck of a lot

"We need all members to play a role in being the change they'd like to see."



AFSCME Local 3537 bargaining team members, from left to right: Michelle Christensen, Chris Klein, Jessica Rugerio and Chuck Coulter.

for their communities and for the county and they need to be compensated fairly. I think we're on that path now."

Council 31 Staff Representative Lori Laidlaw led negotiations for the union, along with Local President Chuck Coulter, Klein, Michelle Christensen and Jessica Rugerio.

"Together," Klein said, "we made sure we were getting the fairest possible agreement for every single member."

Solidarity wins in Urbana

AFSCME LOCAL 1331 MEMBERS stuck together at the bargaining table to ensure fairness for every employee at the City

of Urbana. Together the local negotiated several big wins including increases in seniority pay, shift differentials, training pay, a new career ladder in public works and an added holiday.

But the biggest win was when the 35-member local stood up for three of its members in front of the City Council. Parking enforcement officers were the lowest-paid classification in the bargaining unit. At a membership meeting, Local 1331 members universally decided to put their full support behind raising wages for the members in this position.

They went straight to the City Council to demand fair wage increases. Members from each department testified at an online council meeting, calling on the council and the mayor to value their work as a group and to raise wages, especially for the parking enforcement officers.



AFSCME Local 1331's bargaining team stuck together, from left to right: Hal Livingston, Dave Osterbur, Cale Beccue, Jason Scott and Takela Lucas.

Lucas, Dave Osterbur, Cale Beccue and Hal Livingston.

Raising wages in Kewanee

AFSCME LOCAL 764 MEMBERS at the city of Kewanee will see their incomes increase by more than 10% over the next three years thanks to recent contract negotiations.

"Economics is always a big challenge at the table when we're trying to get compensated the way we should be compensated," Local President James Maxon said. "We fought for a stipend from the American Rescue Plan Act funds, and we got it. Economically we got a really good package."

The local represents 22 members at the city. The foreman of the water division that maintains and repairs the water distribution system, Maxon has

"It was important to get

worked for the city for 17 years. He said these negotiations were markedly different than those in the past.

“We’ve had some challenges with management and this contract was a big step forward in having a better relationship,” Maxon said. “The mayor sat in on the first two sessions and that was a big help; he listened to concerns from both sides. I’ve been involved in the last five contracts and that was the first time the mayor was there.”

Maxon said negotiations went smoothly because both sides were willing to give and take, but the union didn’t back down. The team secured longevity bumps and certification bonuses and strengthened member rights throughout the contract.

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Joshua Schipp, the bargaining team included Maxon, Gary Kilstrom, Kristi Lemanski and Brandon Peart.

Positive changes in Niles

AFSCME LOCAL 2953 MEMBERS at the Village of Niles secured a four-year agreement retroactive to May 1, 2021. The bargaining team ensured that all union members will receive nearly 10% in raises over the life of the agreement.

Local President Mark Blickhahn said he was most proud of getting a four-year



AFSCME Local 2953 members do everything in the Village of Niles, including ridding neighborhoods of pests! Here, Andrew Wywrot gets ready to set rat traps.

“We’ve got to look out for those coming up behind us and those who came before us.”

agreement to bring stability to a very economically uncertain time. He was referring to the pandemic, but the bargaining team was also dealing with an uncertain and changing management landscape within the village and the local during negotiations.

The team started negotiations a year and a half ago, and during that time a new village manager was installed, three

different human resources directors were at the helm and the local’s own vice president retired. Despite all those challenges, the local also helped ensure that the village fairly implemented its new insurance option.

“We spent a lot of time all working together to make it as fair for everyone as possible,” Blickhahn said. “We were able to bring to light some issues that could negatively affect

people, especially those on the lower end of the pay scale. We were thanked by management for doing that work because the adjustments we made are going to benefit everyone.”

Local 2953 members truly make the village run, working as office and field staff in the police and fire departments, in public works, at the senior center, and in family services, IT, finance and community development.

Retired staff will also receive the retroactive raises the bargaining team secured, and their pensions will be adjusted to reflect that. Blickhahn believes solidarity like this is the secret to the diverse local’s success: “We’ve got to look out for those coming up behind us and those who came before us.”

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen, Blickhahn was joined on the bargaining team by John Montejo, Trish Finn, Jen Trunco, Dennis O’Donovan and Sam Serbikian.

Fairness at Rockford Housing Authority

SOME 30 AFSCME LOCAL 1058A members are working to fulfill the Rockford Housing Authority’s mission of providing quality homes for low-income city residents. Together they secured a three-year agreement that will ensure

fair wages for the dedicated employees.

Union members will receive across-the-board raises in every year of the contract, with the first year’s raises retroactive to April 1, 2021—a total of 14.25% income increase over four years. And four upgraded positions will see an additional 6% elevation in their salaries going forward.

The bargaining team also secured improvements on union rights, discipline and grievance language and made significant improvements to promotions and training. They kept any changes to health insurance at bay for two more years.

“I was really happy with the financial upgrades for people,” said Local President Christina Loudermilk. “This group took a lot of cuts in the past so the raises that they got were fair and a long time coming.”

RHA public housing includes scattered single-family houses and high-rise apartments for seniors. AFSCME members help place lower-income residents in quality housing and provide services for the people living in public housing communities.

“They really care about their clients, they look out for them,” Loudermilk said. “It’s not just a job to them.”

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Christopher Hooser, Loudermilk was joined on the bargaining team by Rosilind Gulley, T’Nisha Gray, Lucy Burton, Leanna Clark and Elias Sorias.



AFSCME Local 764 bargaining team, left to right: Brandon Peart, Kristi Lemanski, Gary Kilstrom and James Maxon.



AFSCME Local 1058 bargaining team shakes hands with Rockford Housing Authority management over a settled contract.

SHORT REPORTS



Solidarity with Ukraine

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 STANDS in solidarity with the brave people of Ukraine against Russian President Vladimir Putin's immoral war on their nation and their democracy.

The AFSCME International Executive Board passed a resolution expressing our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, including the call for public pension fund divestment from assets linked to Russia. To that end, on March 7 Council 31 sent letters to the Illinois State Board of Investment, which governs investment policy for the State Employees' Retirement System, as well as to other public pension funds in Illinois in which AFSCME members participate, calling for the prudent divestment of pension fund assets with ties to Russia.

"AFSCME strongly condemns Putin's shameful assault on the nation of Ukraine. Each of us must do our part to support the valiant resistance of the Ukrainian people in their struggle to protect their democracy," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch wrote. "This is truly a global emergency that compels all freedom-loving people of conscience to take urgent action to support the people of Ukraine."

Soon after, Brian Collins, executive director of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund, replied to AFSCME's letter, stating: "Please rest assured that we have been examining our portfolio for investments in Russia and will be discussing the matter with our full Board."

AFSCME is urging union members to consider a contribution to international relief organizations that are moving humanitarian aid to the people of Ukraine.

"Ukrainians are demonstrating extraordinary courage and resolve in standing up to a violent autocrat," AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. "Their defense of their country is nothing short of inspiring. AFSCME's belief in human rights—wherever in the world they may be threatened—demands that we do what we can."

AFSCME member honored for service

AFSCME LOCAL 2226 MEMBER Terry Bassett, a lieutenant at Cook County Jail, won the 100 Club of Illinois Annual Valor Award and the Cook County Sheriff's Office's Life-saving Award for saving the life of a man he found unconscious from a drug overdose.

While doing rounds outside the facility, Bassett spotted an individual at a bus stop lying on the ground. The man was barely breathing. After Bassett called dispatch to activate 911, he said, "I started to assess his responsiveness. I spoke loudly, shook him, performed sternal rubs, all to no effect. He was nonresponsive, and his breathing was very shallow."

That's when a state's attorney investigator pulled up and was able to supply Bassett with Narcan, a medication used for the emergency treatment of opioid overdose. Bassett

administered the Narcan and was able to revive the man until the ambulance arrived.

Sadly, this isn't an unusual occurrence in Bassett's line of work. The opioid crisis is rampant, and overdoses tend to increase as the weather becomes warmer.

"People don't know what they're taking," Bassett said, shaking his head. "Dealers are lacing these drugs with fentanyl. If they don't get it right, it's fatal."

Fentanyl can be so toxic, Bassett said, that even touching someone's sweaty skin can cause a severe reaction.

As for the accolades, he took them in stride. "To be honest with you, I was just doing my job," Bassett said. "Although I appreciate the awards, I accept them for my whole shift. Everybody here breaks their back every day, going above and beyond."

Workers' rights on the ballot

THIS FALL ILLINOIS VOTERS will have the opportunity to vote yes for the Workers' Rights Amendment. It's an important step to add protection to the state Constitution that will make it much harder for current or future politicians to limit workers' voices on the job, weaken unions or take

away workers' rights to collective bargaining.

With the Workers' Rights Amendment in place, politicians couldn't simply change the law to take away wages, benefits, workplace safety protections or other provisions of union contracts—the state Constitution would stand in their way.

AFSCME will be working to educate union members and our communities about the importance of this constitutional amendment. Get ready to vote yes in November and learn more at workersrights.com.

Illinois primary election is June 28

AS ON THE MOVE GOES TO print, AFSCME's regional PEOPLE meetings—where local union representatives make recommendations for endorsements in state and local primary elections—are getting underway. In May, PEOPLE chairs will meet to make their statewide endorsements at the PEOPLE conference in Springfield.


The primary election happens later than usual this year, moving from March to June 28, due to the extended time needed to collect census data. Early voting starts May 23. The

union's endorsements will be available at AFSCME31.org by that date.

"Be sure you're registered to vote for the primary and make a plan to vote," said Council 31 Intergovernmental Affairs Director Adrienne Alexander. "Every vote counts, and early voting is a convenient way to make your voice heard."

Illinois has made voting easier and safer than ever before, expanding early voting and vote-by-mail, and making Election Day for the general election a state holiday: Schools and local and state government buildings will be closed Nov. 8 to allow them to safely host polling places.

In addition to the Workers' Rights Amendment, in the general election Illinois voters will elect a US Senator, all members of Congress, all statewide offices including governor, members of the Illinois House and Senate, county offices including county boards, and the Illinois Supreme Court.

"Control of the Illinois Supreme Court will be decided by two races in the suburban Chicago area," Alexander said. "Big corporate interests and anti-worker front groups will no doubt join forces to try to take over the Supreme Court, in part to attack public employee pensions. That's why it's critically important to elect friends of working people to these seats." 



New AFSCME members at Whiteside Co. Health Dept, from left to right: Jeanne Nailor, Lindsey Peterson, Adrienne O'Brian, Stephanie Stichter, and Elvira Hernandez.

RETIREE NOTES



In a March 7 news conference, retirees called on legislators to make an additional pension payment in the next fiscal year.

Retirees back better state pension funding

“I RELY ON MY PENSION TO get by,” Patricia Johnson, an AFSCME retiree from Chicago, said to a room full of reporters. “For paying my rent, my car loan, my food, and for medicine. In my case, I have a blood disorder where I get blood clots, and the medication that I’m on is very expensive.”

Johnson was one of dozens of AFSCME retirees from around the state who converged on Springfield March 7 to urge lawmakers to better fund their pensions. They joined with retired teachers under the banner of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans for a news conference supporting Governor JB Pritzker’s proposal to not only make the state’s required pension payment this year, but to contribute an additional \$500 million on top of that.

The state’s contribution goes to the State Employees Retirement System (SERS), State University Retirement System (SURS), Teachers Retirement System (TRS), Judges Retirement System (JRS), and General Assembly Retirement System (GARS).

Politicians created the pension debt by skipping or shorting required payments over a period of decades. That debt threatens the stability of the retirement systems and

fuels attacks by those who want to slash the modest benefits promised to future retirees.

Governor Pritzker’s plan to pay down that extra \$500 million early was projected to save \$1.8 billion in the long run. In the end, the General Assembly voted to approve an extra \$300 million payment.

“Our top priority is to safeguard pensions.”

Although it’s not as much as retirees wanted and the governor proposed, “It’s a win for all Illinoisans because it will result in saving even more money and seeing the state’s credit rating improve,” said Eric Kenney, an AFSCME retiree from Sullivan who spoke at the event. “[It’s] what’s right and what is fiscally responsible.”

Cook County pension legislation

IN THE SPRING LEGISLATIVE session, AFSCME Chapter 31 supported HB 4980, legislation introduced by the County Employees’ and Officers’ Annuity and Benefit Fund of Cook County and the Forest Preserve District Employees’ Annuity and Benefit Fund of Cook County (CCPF). The bill

proposes replacing the current inadequate funding model with a mechanism that will guarantee that employer’s contributions toward retirement benefits are sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension fund.

As *On the Move* went to print, HB 4980 was stuck in the House Rules Committee.

Established decades ago, the funding language in the pension code for CCPF calculates the county’s contributions at a level significantly lower than what is needed to properly fund retirement benefits.

HB 4980 requires actuarial-based funding for CCPF as is done for the other large public pension plans in the state. While it will increase county contributions, actuarial funding is the key to maintaining fiscal health for a pension plan because it is based on refined, yearly calculations of what investments are necessary to make all benefit payments in the future.

While in recent years the Cook County Board has provided additional contributions to CCPF to supplement its inadequate statutorily required payment, this arrangement must be approved annually with no guarantee that it will be done by future Cook County Boards. If supplemental contributions are not maintained, it would result in increased costs to taxpayers over the long-term and could exhaust the pension funds, meaning pension benefits could not be paid out.

“Retirees live on fixed incomes, so our top priority is to safeguard pensions,” AFSCME Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe said. “That’s why this legislation is so important. It only makes sense that the General Assembly pass this legislation to ensure the long-term fiscal stability of the Cook County Pension Fund and a fiscally secure path forward for both taxpayers and Cook County retirees.”

Chapter 31 loses long-time champion

“WE ARE BETTER AS AN organization because of the diligence and dedication of our former Southern-Vice President, Dorothy Asbury who passed away on March 29,” stated Larry Brown, president of AFSCME Illinois Retirees Chapter 31. “While we are sad at her passing, we are forever grateful for the work she did to

sub-chapter before becoming president in 2001 and state-wide southern vice-president in 2003.

Dorothy never backed down from a political fight, whether it was protesting Congressman Shimkus’ support of Social Security privatization in 2003 or taking part in a truth tour around southern Illinois to bring attention to the high cost of prescription drugs for seniors.

When demonstrating to prevent the closure of Murray Developmental Center, in 2012 she spoke at a news conference against Gov. Quinn’s plan to displace disabled residents: “I cannot see where this will save the state money, but I can definitely see where it will cause harm.”

Dorothy was inducted into the AFSCME Chapter 31 Hall of Fame based on her demonstrated commitment to her sub-chapter and Chapter 31. “She focuses on organizing our Chapter wherever she goes,” said Executive Board member Dick Dawdy at her induction,



Subchapter President 59 Dorothy Asbury walking in the Labor Day Parade.

“We will all be better off because of the standard she set.”

fight for retirement security for all and build our organization.”

Dorothy, who passed away at the end of March, became a member of the Alton’s retiree sub-chapter 59 over 22 years ago after retiring from Alton Mental Health Center. She became an executive board member and trustee within the

“and makes it her mission to help retirees speak with as strong a voice as possible—because we earned the right to retire with dignity.”

“While it is difficult to say goodbye,” said Larry Brown, “we will all be better off because of the standard she set, and her friendship.”



NURSING HOME RALLIES IN STORM, AFTERMATH

On the night of February 28, 2017, a giant storm ripped through Illinois. The damage was concentrated in LaSalle County but reached all the way up to the Chicago suburbs. Multiple tornadoes, large hail, strong winds and heavy rain killed two people and injured dozens. Roofs were ripped off homes, trees were uprooted, cars were wrecked.

AFSCME members were out in the community in force, volunteering to help their neighbors. One group—AFSCME Local 978—worked particularly hard the night of the tornado to protect the health and safety of the elderly and ailing residents of the LaSalle County Nursing Home.

Victoria Manning was one of those AFSCME members. She's worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at the home for 14 years and was working the night the tornado hit.

Weathering the storm

"It was rough. We had only minutes to get our 68 residents to a safe, windowless area. Everyone was scared and I remember we sang 'You Are My Sunshine' to calm them," Manning recalled. "After the storm we saw our doors and windows were blown out, the phone lines were down, there was debris everywhere, and the gazebo was just... gone. But all our residents were unharmed."

The damage to the nursing home was so extensive that the residents had to be moved out and the home closed for more than six months. Manning said finding alternative care homes for the now displaced residents was an emotional time.

"The residents were upset and scared, they didn't want to leave," Manning said, "but we told them we have to do this, and we'd see them soon."

Starting over

While the home was closed for repairs after the residents were moved out, CNAs, nurses and activity aids went out to the facilities where residents were staying to visit with them. But over time, many staff were laid off and moved on to other jobs. AFSCME didn't give up, though. A core group of members stuck together to prevent permanent closure of the home.

Once the home was rebuilt, it reopened as a skilled care nursing facility eligible for Medicare and Medicaid residents [when]. But because of low wages, the home had difficulty recruiting new CNAs. Before the tornado, the nursing home had 20 CNAs on the day shift alone, Local President Vickey Leadingham said. But early this winter, there were only eight CNAs on staff total.

"We were super short staffed because starting pay was \$12 an hour," Manning said. "We were working double shifts and we really needed to get staff in here so we could accommodate more residents."

"The county was contracting with a staffing agency to ensure they had adequate ratios

for resident care," she said. "They are paid a lot more, but they don't know the facility or the residents. It's not doing justice to the citizens of LaSalle County and especially the residents who live in the home to use agency staff."

Change for the better


To address the problem, AFSCME worked with Carrie Becker, the nursing home administrator, to move the LaSalle County Board to increase the starting

wage of CNAs to \$20 an hour, with a 50-cent increase after six months. As a result, the home has been able to hire more than 10 CNAs already.

CNAs like Manning who already worked at the home saw their wages go up by

at least \$3 more per hour than the new starting rate of pay in December. "It was a good Christmas!" Manning said with a smile. "We all really loved that we were making a change. We're at 50 residents now and we're hoping to get more CNAs so we can welcome even more."

"We have empty beds even though there's a waiting list of people who want to live here," Leadingham said. "We just couldn't accept new residents because we didn't have enough staff. Now we can fill these beds. It's a win-win for everybody."

"Our residents are our number one priority," said Manning. "It's their home. We're here to work for them." 

"Our residents are our number one priority."