

ON THE

MOVE



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THE FIGHT TO SAVE PUBLIC SERVICES

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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Building power to protect our pensions

One man should not call all the shots



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

THE LABOR MOVEMENT IS OUR BEST HOPE

For weeks now we've been inundated with TV ads, glossy mailers and even digital messages about one political candidate or another in the lead up to the primary election in our state.

By the time you read this, the primary will be over and we'll be on our way to the general election which will likely generate an even heavier diet of communications.

I don't mind the glut of information, really. I know which organizations I can trust to provide truthful and helpful material about how the candidates' positions will impact working families. And, of course, our union is my most reliable source of all. Our PEOPLE committees—short for Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality—are the union's political arm, made up of local union leaders from all across the state who pore over the voting records of incumbent legislators and conduct in-person interviews with newcomers with a laser-like focus on issues that matter to us as public service workers.

Among the most important of all the races that will be before us this November are two contests that may not yet be on the radar screens of most union members. But they will influence the lives of every public employee in Illinois for decades to come: two open seats on the Illinois Supreme Court. One in the 3rd district that includes Kankakee, LaSalle, Will and four other counties; the other in the 2nd district includes DuPage, Lake, Kane, Kendall and McHenry counties.

To understand how critical these races are, we have to go back and look at what happened in the 2020 election when Chief Justice Tom Kilbride was up for a retention vote. Justice Kilbride, a Democrat and long-time champion of workers' rights on the court, was widely respected within the legal community. Yet he lost that election—the first time that a sitting judge was ever denied retention—even though he won 56% of the vote (retention requires 60%).

How could that happen when Justice Kilbride had the

support of every union in the state of Illinois—ranging from the teachers to the teamsters—as well as numerous other civic and legal organizations? The answer is simple and deeply alarming: Ken Griffin.

Griffin is Illinois' richest individual—worth some \$29 billion—and he is determined to re-shape Illinois politics to his own benefit. In 2014 and 2018, Griffin was Bruce Rauner's biggest backer, contributing a total of \$36 million over the course of Rauner's two elections. And he also poured tens of millions into the campaign to defeat the Fair Tax ballot initiative, which would have ensured that the wealthy paid a little more in taxes so the rest of us wouldn't have to.

But perhaps most disturbing, Ken Griffin almost single-handedly knocked Tom Kilbride off the Illinois Supreme Court. Griffin is rumored to have a particular animus toward public employee pensions and, according to Chicago magazine, Kilbride was viewed as “an obstacle to the conservative project of reforming the state's pension system.” Of course, in this context “reforming” should be read as “dismantling.”

In fact, the head of the front group, Citizens for Judicial Fairness, to which Griffin contributed some \$11 million to defeat Kilbride authored a column in the Chicago Tribune in which he described Illinois public employee pensions as “too rich.” Given that the average benefit paid out by the state and university retirement systems is \$37,000 (with many pensioners excluded from Social Security), the only thing “rich” in this case is a billionaire like Griffin trying to rob Illinois public employees of the benefits they have earned.

The good news, maybe, is that the state Supreme Court's two key rulings in 2015 and 2016—striking down legislation that attempted an end run around the Illinois' constitu-


tion's pension protection clause were unanimous—with both Democrats and Republicans on the court voting to ensure the integrity of our state's pension benefits.

The not-so-good news, however, is that Griffin and company are betting that Republicans on the court—just like in the legislature—have changed a lot over the past few years and are much more likely to let their billionaire backers call the shots. GOP gubernatorial candidate Darren Bailey was the chief sponsor of legislation to overturn the constitutional protection for public employee pensions. And GOP House Minority Leader Jim Durkin said he would happily sponsor legislation to that same end.

The Illinois Policy Institute and its wealthy backers continue to promote their distorted world view in which public employee unions dominate in political contests. But the simple—and painful—fact is that one super-wealthy man, Ken Griffin, puts more money into any given election cycle than all unions combined in our state.

So in reality, our best hope of remaining a democracy governed by the rule of law and responsive to the interests of the majority rather than an oligarchy is to build the power, including the political power, of the labor movement.

Griffin is doing everything he can—giving more than \$6 million already—to defeat the Democratic candidates for the Illinois Supreme Court. “The hedge fund executive, who has already spent \$50 million to back Aurora Mayor Richard Irvin for governor, has once again poured money into Citizens for Judicial Fairness, a conservative independent expenditure committee,” reports the Chicago Tribune.

We need to build our PEOPLE program ever stronger—in dollars and in boots on the ground—to stop Kenny G in his tracks. If you're not a PEOPLE contributor yet, now's the time to become one. If you are, increase your contribution to the MVP level. And if you live in one of the targeted court districts, plan now to volunteer with your union to get out the vote. Your retirement security may depend on it. 

Protecting at-risk kids, staying safe

Tragic and dangerous incidents threaten DCFS staff, families

Six months ago, AFSCME Local 805 member Deidre Silas was brutally stabbed to death while working to safeguard children. Just four years before that, AFSCME Local 448 member Pamela Knight died from injuries sustained while protecting the safety of a child.

These murders are a tragic reminder of the dangers that DCFS employees face because of the work they do every day to help families.

This May, staff at a DCFS office in Joliet were threatened by an aggrieved father. That weekend, the office was shot up in the middle of the night—

“The thing that keeps DCFS employees going is that we have a passion to keep families and kids safe.”

with extensive damage to the door and front windows. The office and surrounding area were deserted at that hour, so no one was hurt. Law enforcement investigating the shooting believe the two events were related.

At AFSCME’s urging, management agreed to close the office for a few days. When it reopened, management doubled security staff in the office and stationed a police officer outside the building to provide escorts in and out.

“It was rough on our members at the Joliet office. The investigator involved and her supervisor both experienced trauma from the incident,” said Keith Smith, a Local 2794 member who serves on the DCFS standing committee. “The communication we received from management was sporadic and inconsistent and confusing.”

United voice for change

“These disturbing incidents serve to further sharpen our union’s focus on the ongoing work to strengthen protections for DCFS employees,” Regional Director Anne Irving said. “Our union’s DCFS standing committee is unrelenting in striving to create

a safe workplace for all DCFS employees.”

In the last six months alone, AFSCME helped pass legislation to allow investigators to be trained on and carry Mace for self-protection, and to ensure that families of state employees killed on the job can continue to receive health insurance benefits. The union also supported a measure to strengthen penalties for assaulting DCFS employees, but the legislation did not pass.

Through the AFSCME DCFS standing committee, the union is working on several initiatives:

- Helping move equipment—like panic buttons that automatically contact law enforcement and stab-proof clothing—from pilot phase to state-wide implementation.
- Ensuring workers can make house calls in pairs or accompanied by local law enforcement.
- Instituting hands-on trainings in self-defense and de-escalation including annual refreshers.
- Improving threat assessment information and making



Keith Smith

it available before a case is assigned.

- Expanding the number of counties with designated law enforcement partners for timely and appropriate response when needed in the field.

Smith believes the union standing committee he serves



DEIDRE SILAS HONORED AT ILLINOIS WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY

The Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect 51 years ago on April 28. Since 1989, the day has been commemorated by American labor unions as Workers' Memorial Day. This year's Illinois AFL-CIO's annual memorial service was dedicated to AFSCME Local 805 member Deidre Silas, a DCFS investigator murdered on the job on January 4, 2022.

on is one of the most powerful tools employees have to ensure safer working conditions.

“The committee meetings are a unique opportunity for



Arnold Black

us to have direct contact with decision-makers in management,” he said. “We recognize the severity of the safety concerns that our members are dealing with, and we have a strong lobbying voice to push management to make changes and to hold them accountable.”

Staying the course

Arnold Black, president of Local 2971 and a Council 31 executive board member, said some of the steps the state has taken recently in response to the union are encouraging. Staff members can go out in pairs without supervisory permission, or can request an escort by law enforcement. Background checks on individuals involved in cases are completed faster now to ensure timely and accurate assessments of situations before caseworkers visit a family.

But Black, an investigations supervisor who also serves on the standing committee, said understaffing is still a critical issue that the state has not done enough to address.

“It’s hard to retain employees in this job, especially when we are short-staffed,” Black said. “The Bloomington region has been staffed at 15% for more than a year. [There are only three investigators when there are supposed to be 19.]

It’s a revolving door and there’s been no solution to the problem. All these vacancies mean you don’t have enough workers to do the work.”

Black said the state has moved to digital applications—“we’re now finally in the digital age, in 2022.” But the hiring process is still very slow and despite the good pay and benefits, it’s a hard job that calls for uniquely qualified candidates.

Despite the challenges, DCFS employees remain committed to the agency’s child welfare mission.

“The thing that keeps DCFS employees going is that we have a passion to keep families and kids safe,” said Black.

“We have a genuine concern for the children’s safety and the families that we serve,” Smith agreed. “We’re short on staff, short on resources, we’re beat up by management, but the fact that we’re helping a child come out of a situation that is life-threatening to a situation that could change their life for the better is ultimately the driving force keeping us in this job.”

What we've learned from the COVID pandemic

Lessons gleaned from two years of uncertainty, hardship and loss

More than two years into the COVID pandemic, its impact on every person and community is immense and ongoing. *On the Move* reached out to local union leaders to ask this question: What have you learned from the pandemic? Here's a sample of what they shared.

Shaun Dawson, President

LOCAL 2073, LOGAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER, LOGAN

In the onset of the pandemic, it was made very clear that the state would become reliant on the union to preserve the safety and sanitation of the facilities and mitigate the spread of a virus which they were wildly unprepared for. As our facilities ran rampant with the spread of the virus, it was and still is this union who continues to combat the impact. Regardless of your stance on the virus or the pandemic it was this union that stepped up to provide what the state and the department couldn't: Safety.

Sandra Foreman, Secretary-Treasurer

LOCAL 2946, CITY OF CHICAGO

Employees had never experienced such harsh, threatening work conditions before. AFSCME stepped in and gave guidance, making sure employees were able to work both onsite and offsite without the city or employees missing a beat. We continued to perform those services while AFSCME was working out details full speed ahead. I am very proud of the work my union has done.

William Watson, President

LOCAL 141, CHOATE MENTAL HEALTH & DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER, ANNA

The pandemic highlighted the importance of the care our members provide at our state's direct care centers. Being mandated to work multiple shifts of overtime week in and week out has always been stressful but having to do so in full PPE is more physically and emotionally draining. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of our union in the workplace, from ensuring safe working conditions to making sure staff are paid while being off with COVID or caring for their family.

Emile Jorgensen, Executive Board

LOCAL 505, CHICAGO DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH

We learned that our work is a matter of life and death. I used math and patterns to determine how early we needed to detect increases in COVID spread in order to impose restrictions (like remote school) that move people apart to reduce transmission. I also worked on creating an index that set priorities for COVID vaccination with a goal of reducing inequitable health

burden (COVID infections, hospitalization and death) by race and ethnicity.

Deneen M. Brunson, Vice President

LOCAL 2467, ILLINOIS DEPT. OF REVENUE AND LOTTERY, CHICAGO

I've always thanked God for each day, but COVID-19 has shown me how precious each day is. I had friends and family get ill and a few friends die. I've learned to cherish relationships with family and friends daily. This pandemic has shaken the world and I pray that people have learned lessons that will help this country become a better place to live in peace and harmony.

Barbara Hengels, Member

LOCAL 1275, ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COVID changed how I worked and related to the kids as a school bus driver. We were all behind masks and the majority of our communication with kids is reading their facial expressions to see how they are doing, but we all stepped up to make that extra connection with our students.

Christine Rivera, Recording Secretary

LOCAL 3492, RAY GRAHAM ASSOCIATION, DUPAGE CO.

I learned how important it was to work as a team to keep each other safe as well as the people we support on the job as DSPs. Encouraging each other, reaching out and keeping in touch was very important since many of us couldn't see our friends and family in person for long periods of time.

"I LEARNED HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS TO WORK AS A TEAM TO KEEP EACH OTHER SAFE."

Mimi Davis, Steward

LOCAL 699, BLOOMINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

There's a book entitled "Work Won't Love You Back." That's been a real insight for me during the pandemic. But on the bright side, my union does love me back. Every day I see that, in our increase in membership, more folks wanting to be involved, and thoughtful suggestions for myself and other stewards at my library to pursue, not to mention the solidarity and camaraderie.

Kimberly Martin Turner, President

LOCAL 1178, COOK COUNTY HHS

I was deemed an essential worker and had to show up every day for work. I also had the role of union president and had to fight for my members and their rights in the workplace. As a union leader I was super proud that I

"THE PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR UNION."

belonged to AFSCME! Having a strong union in the workplace showed management that we were not going to back down. We fought hard for our members, and we were able to get most of what we demanded during the pandemic.

Denise R. Williams, President

LOCAL 1669, CITY OF CHICAGO

Take good care of your loved ones, and more importantly, self-care—if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be in a position to care for others. Respect each person's right to make their own decisions; you may not agree with them, but respect where they are. Unfortunately, the pandemic also taught me that we have a long way to go with racial equality here in the United States.

Angela Fry, Recording Secretary

LOCAL 29, SHAPIRO DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER, KANKAKEE

If this pandemic has taught us nothing else, we learned that we have to adapt to the changing world around us. One of the ways Local 29 has adapted was to take our membership meetings to Facebook to afford all our members to still come together and resolve issues in the workplace, such as PPE and staffing.

Loretta Soresie, Vice President

LOCAL 2615, EMPLOYMENT SECURITY, QUAD CITIES

I work in the state employment security office. There were so many people on unemployment due to shutdowns, illness, and constant turnover for employers. We did not have enough staff to manage this. Staff were overworked, didn't feel appreciated, and were constantly under pressure with management's demands. Our union consistently provided alternatives to fix the problems. I am grateful for all the union has done and continues to do for my friends, family and fellow members! 🦋

AFSCME members fight to save county nursing homes

Standing against privatization in DeKalb and Winnebago counties



A FSCME members have been working to block privatization efforts in public nursing homes for decades. Privatization and closures have claimed all but 15 county-owned nursing homes in Illinois.

Public nursing homes assure access to high-quality long-term care for everyone who needs it, no matter their income. But private companies are steadily chipping away at these vital community resources.

Private owners have a profit motive to save costs by cutting corners. That means worse living conditions for a community's most vulnerable people with lower-paid workers and lower staff-to-resident ratios. Privatization then jeopardizes not only access to good long-term care but the jobs, wages and benefits of the workers who provide it.

That's why AFSCME members working at the remaining county-owned homes are uniting with residents, families and communities to stop sales to for-profit companies. In Stephenson County, members of AFSCME Local 2399 and their allies have successfully fought off the latest scheme to sell Freeport-based Walnut Acres. Now two more homes are at risk.

DeKalb County Rehab & Nursing Center

In DeKalb County, AFSCME Local 3537 members at the county nursing home have been

organizing, attending County Board meetings, and contacting board members to tell them to vote against a shortsighted deal to sell their facility to a for-profit company.

The DeKalb County Board has been debating the nursing home's future since late last year, when troubling information came to light about the facility's management under a private company called Management Performance Associates

(MPA). During MPA's tenure running the nursing home, from 1997 to 2021, the facility grew dependent on expensive staffing agencies and lost money due to inconsistent billing. These problems were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the nursing home's challenges, public officials in DeKalb County have indicated that there is a path forward for the nursing home—one which keeps the facility in public hands. Local 3537 members are encouraging the county board to stay this course, working with employees to hasten the facility's financial recovery instead of rushing into a hasty sale.

Chuck Coulter, president of Local 3537, works at the nursing home and has been a

regular presence at the county's recent board meetings. He's worked hard to underscore the ramifications of selling the facility, rallying fellow union members to speak out.

At a board meeting in early June, Coulter stressed that selling the DeKalb County Rehab & Nursing Center "would be telling us that our work to love our residents now has a dollar sign attached to it. That instead of striving for great quality of care, our quality of care will be dependent on what the bottom line is."

As the county board was preparing to vote on a resolution authorizing board chairman John Frieders to move forward with the sale, AFSCME members rallied outside the June 15 board meeting and packed the


board room, testifying about the critical importance of saving the home. They notched a temporary victory when board members put off consideration of any sale for at least a month, giving union members and their allies more time to raise questions and build opposition.

River Bluff Nursing Home

AFSCME Local 473 members who work at Winnebago County's River Bluff Nursing Home have been mobilizing to encourage Winnebago County residents to vote "Yes" for a referendum that would ensure adequate funding for the home in the June 28 primary election.

AFSCME members who work at River Bluff volunteered for shifts to help get out the vote and distribute yard signs in support of River Bluff. The union collaborated with local political campaigns to mobilize additional volunteers to distribute information about the referendum, which will help protect the nursing home from future privatization threats.

AFSCME retirees, local elected officials and River Bluff residents also collaborated with the union to build support for the referendum.

"I have been at River Bluff since September," said resident Linda Kay. "The doctor made me well. The nurses and the aides have been very kind and nice. I really don't want to see this place close because I would have nowhere to go." 

For updates on the referendum, visit AFSCME31.org/vote.

NEW NURSING HOME FUNDING, TRANSPARENCY REQUIREMENTS

On May 31, Governor JB Pritzker signed a new nursing home reform bill into law. When that bill, HB 246, goes into effect, it will strengthen and improve Illinois' nursing homes by providing new funding for higher staffing levels and other quality initiatives, subsidizing wage increases for experienced CNAs, and enacting transparency requirements for nursing home owners and operators.

While the state is still developing the regulations that will guide the implementation of the law, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services currently estimates that the bill will allocate more than \$700 million in state and federal funds for Illinois' nursing homes. Of that amount, roughly half is expected to support higher staffing levels, which are essential for the provision of high-quality care.

More than \$80 million has been set aside to help nursing homes retain experienced staff and reduce turnover. One piece of that develops a higher pay scale for CNAs; those with at least one year of experience should see increases of \$1.50 an hour, with an additional dollar for every year on the job (up to an additional \$6.50 an hour).

The law enacts new reporting requirements that promise to shine a light on for-profit nursing home companies that hide behind LLCs and holding companies while cutting corners on care. Once the new law goes into effect, nursing homes will be required to disclose additional information about their owners and operators. This information can play a vital role in ensuring that businesses that want to make a profit from providing essential services are held accountable for the quality of care they provide.

Adjunct professors, lecturers at SAIC join growing union

In a public letter to their colleagues on May 10, nearly 200 non-tenure-track faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) announced they are forming a union with AFSCME Council 31.

These lecturers and adjunct professors are coming together just months after staff at the school and the museum itself each won their own union elections. Together they form Art Institute of Chicago Workers United (AICWU), part of the AFSCME Council 31 family of local unions.

“Non-tenure-track faculty constitute more than three quarters of the total faculty at SAIC. In building our union, we believe we can secure a much-improved position to negotiate over” pay, benefits and advancement, the letter says. “We need a stronger voice in shaping our own working conditions.”

Some 600 SAIC adjuncts and lecturers are eligible to

join the growing union. Their reasons for doing so echo their fellow union members at the school and museum.

“Our working conditions are intolerable. We write in protest of a two-tier system of compensation and benefits that is creating a permanent underclass of contingent faculty,” the letter goes on. “SAIC has pledged to dismantle inequity, yet the School’s imbalances in compensation, benefits, security, and support further entrench it.”

On the day of their announcement, the non-tenure-track faculty held a celebration and speak-out in front of the Art Institute of Chicago’s Michigan Avenue



Non-tenure-track faculty of the School of the Art Institute celebrate joining Art Institute of Chicago Workers United.

entrance. They were joined by other AICWU members, SAIC students, full-time faculty and other supporters.

Now the AICWU SAIC Faculty organizing committee is working on talking to

every colleague and collecting signed union authorization cards.

“We believe there can be no equity without power-sharing; acting in solidarity, we can disrupt entrenched inequities

at SAIC and pursue more fair-minded, equitable, and inclusive circumstances for all,” the letter adds. “SAIC can demonstrate its commitment to equity by respecting our right to organize.”



Art Institute of Chicago Workers United members kick off bargaining for staff of the school and the museum.

Art Institute of Chicago, SAIC begin bargaining

As their union grows, bargaining for the first Art Institute of Chicago Workers United (AICWU) union contract began in May after a sendoff rally for the 33 members of the bargaining team.

The two certified bargaining units—employees of the School of the Art Institute and the Art Institute of Chicago—have met for three joint bargaining sessions so far. After the joint sessions conclude, each unit

will hold separate sessions to address issues that are unique to each group.

AICWU has proposed its non-economic package, including proposals to ensure non-discrimination and create

a fair process for resolving problems, along with diversity, equity and inclusion provisions. The committees have pressed management on agreeing to common union contract language, including seniority protections for more veteran workers, union rights, layoff protections, grievances, and health and safety protections—particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The union has also proposed a grievance process with binding arbitration for disputes that

cannot be resolved directly with management.

Employees at the two institutions completed bargaining surveys to formulate the committees’ priorities. Bargaining is led by Council 31 Regional Director Helen Thornton and Staff Representative Cameron Day. Members are participating in solidarity actions such as wearing shirts, stickers and buttons to support their bargaining team.

“I’m here to amplify staff voices,” said Eala O’Se, a bargaining committee member from the school unit. “We’ve been fighting for staff to have a seat at the table for years. Now we get to not just ask for changes, but make them happen. And that includes creating equity in diversity and pay,

providing opportunities for individuals to grow, and creating transparency in decision making.”

Nancy Chen, a bargaining committee member from the museum, said that her goal is to “bring a sense of stability, hope, and optimism to my department, which has been through the wringer (and still is going through it) since spring 2020.”

The whole team is energized to fight together for a fair first contract.

“I’m excited to address the needs and concerns of my fellow staff,” Chad Nannenga, a bargaining committee member from the school, said. “Together, we can advocate for a fairer and more equitable environment for everyone.”

“Since our organizing efforts began, I’ve experienced collective support and solidarity through AICWU that I never knew was possible in the workplace,” said museum-side bargaining committee member Lorenzo Conte. “Through meeting colleagues across the museum, sharing our stories, and collaborating to enact lasting changes, our union has given me hope and newfound energy that I want every AIC worker to discover. Workers make the museum what it is today, and through our union, we have the opportunity to shape the museum for years to come!”

CGH illegally retaliated by firing a union supporter

CGH Medical Center in Sterling has been found in violation of state labor law—again. The public hospital illegally retaliated against employees who engaged in lawful activities like talking about their union on non-work time and wrongfully fired an employee who was an outspoken union supporter.

CGH and its managers “demonstrated a pattern of discriminatory conduct against ... union activity,” violating state labor law in nine different instances, an administrative



Brandi Barron

law judge of the Illinois Labor Relations Board found.

The new ruling came less than two months after CGH was found to have previously broken labor law by posting a letter from CEO Paul Steinke instructing employees how to revoke their union membership.

Fired for union support

Most egregious among the latest violations, CGH management wrongfully disciplined, took away job duties from, suspended without pay and finally fired Brandi Barron, an employee who was a vocal union supporter.

As a result, CGH is ordered to offer Barron reinstatement to her job with back pay plus interest, and to “cease and desist from: Interfering with, restraining or coercing its employees ... for engaging in union ... activity.”

“The pattern of illegal retaliation by CGH management from CEO Paul Steinke on down includes some of the worst examples of anti-worker, anti-union behavior in recent memory,” AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Doug Woodson said. “CGH workers

are health care heroes fighting for fair treatment, justice and respect they deserve.”

Barron is now an organizer with AFSCME Council 31, working to build the union at her former place of employment. She hopes the judge’s finding in her case will help further that cause. “Justice for one is justice for all,” she said.

Fighting for a fair contract

CGH workers 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.

At the table, management is insisting it lacks the resources to pay its staff living wages or hire enough



employees to care for patients. But according to CGH’s own documents, the hospital has spent more than \$886,000 on anti-union lawyers from Chicago since December 2019. And it’s getting worse: CGH spent \$339,000 of that amount in

the first four months of 2022, including more than \$200,000 in April alone.

Employees had to overcome management’s relentless two-year anti-union campaign to form their union in the first place. Certified in April 2021,

the local includes 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.

MOURNING A UNION ACTIVIST

AFSCME Council 31 Senior Organizer Dave Bloede pays tribute to Sally Canas, a nurse and union activist at CGH Medical Center who passed away on May 13 after a long battle with cancer. An RN at CGH for more than 15 years, Canas had been recently nominated for The Daisy Award for extraordinary nurses.

I remember the first time I met Sally Canas. I had set up a meeting with workers from the very large 3E Medical Floor at a restaurant in downtown Sterling near the hospital.

We talked for at least two hours that day. She asked great questions and fully supported organizing a union at CGH.

After that meeting, Sally went right to work. She talked to her co-workers in her department and others as well. She started getting union authorization cards and, because she had the respect and admiration of her co-workers, successfully recruited other RNs and CNAs to collect cards as well.

Sally was a great RN. She was compassionate, knowledgeable and



dedicated to her patients. She was always more than willing to go the extra mile at work and for her union, even as she was battling her own illness.

While Sally was having chemo treatments at CGH,

she would text me saying that she talked to another co-worker and that we should be getting their card soon. She took every opportunity to make our union stronger. She kept an eagle eye on the employer, alerting all of us if they were engaging in any anti-union activity.

Sally enjoyed gardening and camping and loved her children and husband Oscar very much. We are all heartbroken at the loss of our union sister. Sally played a critical role in workers winning a union at CGH.

AFSCME PEOPLE POWER: WORKING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

THE DECISIONS THAT A LEGISLATIVE BODY MAKES, whether it is a school board, city council, county board, state legislature, or the U.S. Congress, affect AFSCME members and their families in dramatic ways.

Elected officials vote on budgets that affect employee wages, benefits, working conditions and pensions. They vote on issues of particular concern to AFSCME members, like privatization, and they vote on broader issues of concern to all working families, such as health care reform and workers' compensation.

That's why working people need to have allies among elected officials. And why working people need to work to elect these allies.

That's where the AFSCME PEOPLE program comes in. AFSCME's political action committee allows members to make voluntary contributions into a fund that helps elect candidates friendly to working families.

As 2022 is an election year, AFSCME PEOPLE delegates made endorsements for the June 28 primary election. After local union representatives made recommendations for endorsements in state and local primary elections at regional PEOPLE meetings earlier in the spring, delegates gathered on May 14 in Springfield to make their statewide endorsements at the PEOPLE conference. As *On the Move* went to press, the election results were not yet available. Visit AFSCME31.org/Vote for election results.

Our union is now looking ahead to the general election on Nov. 8. Final endorsements will be made at the PEOPLE conference in August and we'll have union boots on the ground after Labor Day.

Visit AFSCME31.org/Volunteer to get involved in the AFSCME PEOPLE program.

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.

A new Illinois Supreme Court

Looking ahead to this November's general election, among the most important races on the ballot will be those to elect new judges to the Illinois Supreme Court. Here's a quick guide to what you need to know.

How many seats are on the state Supreme Court?

There are seven justices on the Illinois Supreme Court. Three are elected at large from the First District which comprises Cook County. The other four are elected one each from districts around the state. They serve 10-year terms.

How many seats are up for election this fall and where are they?

Right now Democrats on the bench outnumber Republicans 4-3. But with two seats up for grabs in November, control of the Supreme Court hangs in the balance. Those seats are located in the newly redrawn 2nd (including Lake, McHenry, DeKalb, Kendall and Kane counties) and 3rd Districts (DuPage, Will, Kankakee, Iroquois, Grundy, LaSalle and Bureau counties).

Why does the Illinois Supreme Court matter to working people?

Most crucial is the state Supreme Court's role as the last word in the Illinois judicial system. "They resolve all questions of state law and the Illinois Constitution," AFSCME Council 31 supervising counsel Tom Edstrom says.

The Court has repeatedly invoked the state's constitutional pension protection clause to reject attempts to cut pension benefits (first for state and university employees and retirees in the 2015 *Heaton* case, then for city of Chicago employees and retirees in 2016's *Jones v. MEABF*) and to uphold health benefits for retired state employees (in a 2014 case called *Kanerva*).

But that's not all. With the U.S. Supreme Court increasingly overturning federal laws or previous decisions on major issues like voting rights, it seems likely that the state's top court will have an increased role in these arenas.

Plus, "They run the entire judiciary through a system of rules," legal scholar Ann Lousin told WTTW's *Chicago Tonight*. "They make appointments to fill vacancies" on the circuit courts, appellate courts or Supreme Court between elections. And "they publish the rules of evidence for the Illinois courts. That is very important for all cases that are being litigated in Illinois."

Who are the candidates?

The primary election was still being contested as *On The Move* went to print. In the 3rd District, former legislator Mary Kay O'Brien was expected to win the Democratic nomination and face Republican Michael Burke in the fall. In the 2nd District, the crowded primary fields included Democrats Elizabeth Rochford, Nancy Rotering and Rene Cruz as well as Republicans Mark Curran, Susan Hutchinson, John Noverini and Daniel Shanes.



In the primary, AFSCME members and staff volunteered to get out the vote for union-backed candidates, including Sen. Rob Martwick and Rep. Lindsey LaPointe.

Who's involved in the campaign?

Many unions and other groups with an interest in Illinois public policies make endorsements in judicial races. Various bar associations rate each candidate's qualifications on the legal merits. This year, Citizen Action/Illinois is running a grassroots campaign called "Protect Our Courts" to remind voters what's at stake and make sure everyone votes in the Supreme Court races.

Meanwhile, wealthy people and corporations have increasingly tried to use big money to influence the state Supreme Court.

"Just two years ago, \$11.5 million was spent to defeat Justice Tom Kilbride's retention bid, over half of it by the right-wing donors who financed Bruce Rauner's anti-union gubernatorial campaign," AFSCME lawyer Edstrom says.

This year, those right-wing donors—namely billionaire CEOs Ken Griffin and Dick Uihlein—are at it again. Griffin has already given more than \$6 million to the same political action committee that attacked Justice Kilbride. Thinking about the court's recent history as the last line of defense against pension thieves, Edstrom asks, "What results might we expect from a court packed with opponents of public employees?"

Governor signs AFSCME-backed bills

The following bills were signed into law by Gov. JB Pritzker after AFSCME's legislative team helped ensure their passage in the spring session of the Illinois General Assembly.

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 was signed into law by the governor on May 27.

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 was signed into law by the governor on April 29.

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. In a compromise with the Pritzker Administration, a new measure (HB 1167) passed both chambers and was signed by the governor on April 5. The new law 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 restored any personal paid time off used for COVID-related absences previously and provides paycheck protection for school district employees in the event of any future COVID-related closures.

Federal coverage expanded for correctional employees – 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, exempting them from conceal/carry restrictions. The measure passed the General Assembly and was signed into law by the governor on May 13.

Service weapon and badge – Another bill that passed out of the General Assembly and was signed into law with AFSCME backing allows any correctional officer, probation officer, parole agent, gaming board agent, revenue agent or other correctional employee who is currently issued a badge or service weapon to purchase a retirement badge or weapon should they meet certain criteria.

Holding employers accountable – In addition to winning wage increases in the state budget for DSPs and other frontline employees in community disability agencies, AFSCME also succeeded in passing legislation that will require employers at those agencies to certify their compliance of pass-through requirements, ensuring increases go directly to the workers. Gov. Pritzker signed the reporting and accountability bill (HB 4647) into law on May 27.

Filling library board vacancies – Signed by Gov. Pritzker on May 27, HB 5283 amends the Public Library District Act to fill unfilled vacancies on library boards within a reasonable time and allows for the State Librarian to appoint if the trustees fail to do so within 90 days of the vacancy declaration. The law will help libraries avoid lengthy vacancies that hinder provision of services to the public. 

Congratulations to Larry Marquardt Scholarship winners!

A FSCME members and their families can benefit from annual scholarship opportunities to pursue their education goals, including Council 31's annual Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

The \$2,000 scholarships honor the first executive director of Council 31 and a tireless union organizer. Children of AFSCME members or retirees who are high school seniors or college students under the age of 25—as well as members in good standing who plan to attend school full-time—are eligible to apply.

Melessa Herzberg

Melessa Herzberg is an office support specialist at Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville. A member of AFSCME Local 2887, she wants to further her education at the university where she works.

"I have seen the difference between those who are represented by a union and those who are not," Herzberg wrote in her application essay. "I worked for one of the largest marketing companies in the world, which did not have a union. I worked seven

days a week, up to 120 hours a week—all while on a fixed salary with no overtime. Had there been a union in the company, it would not have allowed this kind of work environment.

"The pandemic has put a toll on employers and employees," she continued, "but that does not mean that an employer can mistreat an employee. I think that all companies should have a union to protect the rights of the employees."

Herzberg plans to focus her studies on audio and video production, sound engineering, and digital communications. She hopes to someday use her degree to help churches, nonprofits, businesses and unions get their message out.

Joseph Nelson

The son of AFSCME Local 3477 member and Cook County probation officer Patrick




Melessa Herzberg and Joseph Nelson, 2022 winners of the Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

Having worked for companies that did not have a union, I have seen the union difference.

Nelson, Joseph Nelson plans to attend DePaul University in Chicago this school year.

He will focus his studies on theatre, violin, film and journalism.

"My father has been a member of AFSCME since 2001. Because of this, he has job security, consistent raises, and good quality health insurance," Joseph's application essay read. "This has been critical for our family as my younger brother was born prematurely and spent three weeks in the hospital, and my father was injured at work six years ago which left him with a permanent disability that has required a lot of medical care."

Unions also provide a counterbalance to management's power, Joseph said. "It takes the average Amazon employee over five years to earn what CEO Jeff Bezos makes in a minute. Amazon is a very egregious example of income inequality, but in most large corporations, the people generating the profit are not reaping their fair share of the benefits of their own labor. The labor movement provides most of the critical safeguards that secure better salaries and benefits for workers and combats income inequality. By helping workers to harness their collective power, labor unions are the vehicle for workers to assert their rights, win salary increases and other benefits, and be protected from exploitation." 

Applications for the Larry Marquardt scholarship are due the third Friday in April each year. To learn more about more scholarship opportunities for AFSCME members, retirees and their children, visit [AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships](https://www.afscme31.org/union-scholarships).

Trinity Webb wins 2022 AFSCME Family Scholarship

This year the national AFSCME Family Scholarship Program provided 12 scholarships of \$2,000 each to graduating high school seniors for four years as a full-time student in any course of study.

One of those 12 students is Trinity Webb, daughter of AFSCME Local 1006 member Fatima Brown, who is a financial operations executive at the Illinois Dept. of Employment Security.

Trinity graduated this spring from Horizon Science Academy in Southwest Chicago. She will be attending Southern University in Baton Rouge this coming school year.

"There aren't enough words to describe how proud I am of my daughter," Brown said. "She struggled a bit early in the pandemic and in September 2021 when her great-grandmother who helped raise her passed away. But through it all she was able to persevere and became valedictorian of her class. Thank you AFSCME for helping to reward my daughter for her hard work!"



Trinity Webb

Brown said she has always brought her daughter to union events and told her of the value of being an active union member. That knowledge and background is clear in Trinity's application essay.


"I learned about what unions like AFSCME are from my mom who's a working union member," Trinity wrote. "She told me that [being a member of a] union is why she's been able to do things like enjoy time off with me and my sister and still get paid. [It makes] me smile knowing that AFSCME was the

reason why my mom was able to provide a comfortable living for my baby sister and me."

"Trinity has been front and center with me many days during rallies and volunteering with me while I served as the recording secretary of Local 1006," Brown said. And those times taught Trinity so much.

"I can remember going to my mom's local union office with her on weekends and helping put together newsletters, stuffing envelopes, and putting stamps on postcards," Trinity recalled. "I also remember being with my mom for protests in Chicago and Springfield with AFSCME. Seeing so many diverse people come together to fight for the greater good was moving."

Trinity said her mom's involvement in her union inspired her to give back to her community and join the student council to make changes at her school. She's going to carry those lessons with her into the future.

"When I get to college, I plan to be active and involved with clubs and organizations that focus on social justice," Trinity wrote. "This is what AFSCME is all about." 

Union pushes for accountability at DOC

Community comes together to oppose closures

After assurances that no facility would be closed in its broad restructuring plan that was unveiled last year, the Illinois Department of Corrections has now announced plans to drastically downsize Pontiac and Vandalia Correctional Centers.

In fact, the department launched a unit shutdown at Pontiac CC without notification to the union—or appropriate protocols in place for movement of offenders.

AFSCME immediately made a demand to bargain over the impact of the closure and other proposed changes. But despite assurances to the contrary, it soon became apparent that IDOC had no intention of fulfilling its obligations to engage in good-faith negotiations over its decision to shutter the unit.

Local legislators have held town hall meetings for the public to comment and ask questions about proposed changes at Pontiac and Vandalia. The communities surrounding the facilities will be economically impacted by closures.

“The Vandalia Correctional Center is an important facility to our communities and our entire region,” said State Representative Blaine Wilhour and State Senator Jason Plummer in an invitation to their June 22 town hall meeting. Vandalia would

be hit hard by the bed reduction proposed for the facility. The main facility would no longer house inmates, only the medium-security unit would. Anticipating the department’s unwillingness to engage with union employees over the proposed changes, AFSCME members at Vandalia Correctional Center have taken up a petition to IDOC Director Rob Jeffreys & Governor JB Pritzker.

Interest arbitration

Labor law requires maintenance of the status quo while decisional or impact bargaining is taking place. However, IDOC rushed forward to complete closure of a unit at Pontiac CC before negotiations had even really gotten off the ground. That closure resulted in a wide range of problems in the offender population by housing medium- and maximum-security individuals on the same unit. And it created more dangerous conditions for the employees

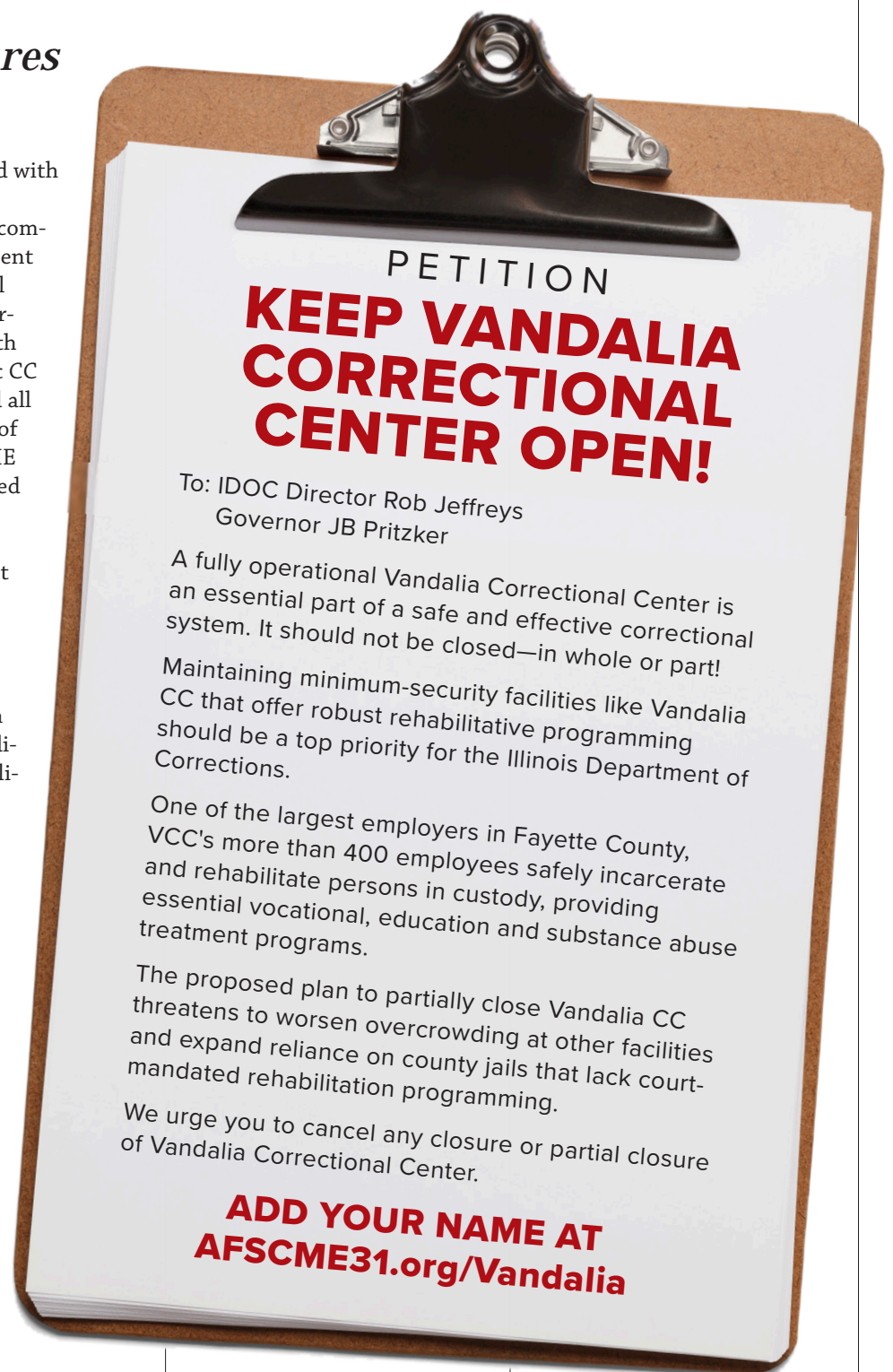
who were moved with them.

In order to compel the department to fulfill its legal obligation to bargain in good faith over the Pontiac CC unit closure and all other elements of its plan, AFSCME has now exercised its legal right to invoke interest arbitration. That process begins with mediation, and the parties have requested a mediator from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

“While the department insists that no employee layoffs will result from the changes, such claims are suspect as it does not appear that the department intends to house offenders at Vandalia going forward,” said Council 31 Regional Director Ed Caumiant. “This plan should also be subject to decisional or impact bargaining—and

will therefore be included in the interest arbitration proceedings

that AFSCME has initiated.”



SAFETY MATTERS

On May 3, AFSCME local union presidents within the Department of Corrections traveled to Springfield to join with departmental leadership for the annual Illinois Correctional Employees' Memorial Association ceremony honoring all those who have given their lives to preserve public safety.

These local leaders wore AFSCME stickers reading “Safety Matters” to send a clear message that echoed the words of the early United Mine-workers’ organizer, “Mother” Mary Jones: We mourn those who have been lost. But we don’t just mourn, we organize to bring about the changes needed to prevent further deaths.

AFSCME members serving in the role of Chief Safety Officer at every facility met in June to discuss the restructuring plan and to focus on safety in the facilities. Together they identified problematic policies and procedures, especially in terms of staff assaults.

“We propose a concrete mechanism to hold management accountable,” Council 31 Regional Director Ed Caumiant said. “We will begin tracking staff assaults and the steps taken to address them in a detailed way so that we can continue to press management to do better and prioritize safety.”



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

United front at U of I

EVEN ALL THE RESTRICTIONS imposed by the coronavirus pandemic couldn't deter AFSCME Local 3700 and Local 698 at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign from their goal of winning a fair contract. It took rallies, campus-wide marches, and a statewide petition drive over the course of more than six months, but these AFSCME members won three-year agreements that provide a minimum annual increase of 2% for every employee, plus longevity and step increases and full retroactive pay.

The two bargaining units hold separate negotiations but "are very much sister unions," said Local 698 President Ben Riegler, a senior library specialist. "We work as a team."

Local 698 represents about 500 members who work in technical and professional positions ranging from library specialists to medical clinic professionals to veterinary technicians. About 1,200 members who work as clerical and administrative staff, as well as in childcare positions and as community outreach workers, make up Local 3700.

"This is a contract we can be very proud of," Riegler said. "We've made some major gains in terms of wages, in particular for our medical groups at the veterinary teaching hospital and the health center on



AFSCME Local 698 and 3700 members held joint rallies and pickets to secure their contract with the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

campus and we were able to get seniority steps for groups that didn't have them previously."

"Being able to have a voice at the table and input on policies that directly affect employees is extremely important and valuable," Riegler said. "If we hadn't pushed, management would have been satisfied giving us less. We made sure we didn't settle for anything less than we felt like we deserved."

Local 3700 President Greg Brannan is an office support specialist at the Illinois Fire Service Institute, the state's fire fighter academy. He said "the absolute focus" for his

bargaining team was getting "the lowest paid employees up to a decent wage. That was our red line and we made sure that management knew it."

Childcare workers at the Child Development Laboratory will receive a nearly 40% raise over the three years of the contract and community outreach workers in the statewide extension program will receive an average 23% raise over the three years. The local also maintained their hard-fought step program that they won back in the most recent contract negotiations.

"Now I want to look to the

future," Brannan said. "We want to come off this really good win, build momentum and hit the ground running next time. A big part of how we'll do that is by continuing to make sure the new hire orientations are as successful as they can be and cultivating our MAT program."

Negotiations for both groups were led by Council 31 Staff Representative Christina De Angelo. The Local 3700 team included Greg Brannan, Andrew Torrey, Lisa Kelly, Cathy Keltz, Jill Ouellette, Joan Wingo, Tobi Wilder, Candy Deaville, Della Jacobs, Heather Mihaly, Michael Stevens, Ryan Snyder, Katrina Smith, Anne Jackson and Sigi Schroth. The Local 698 team included Ben Riegler, Casandis Hunt, Kristi Donze, Heidi Schwartz, Reid McClure, John Bradley, Maggie Rhodes, Jan Harper, Margo Robinson, Zach Tammen, John Bell, Jean Husmann, Bonnie Voyles, Kate Rosenbeck and Rachel Dorney.

wages for our seasonal employees who were being overlooked," Local President Eddie Guzman said. "They are a big asset to our union and to the Joliet Park district. We wanted to make it fairer for them and reward them for their years of dedication."

Guzman has worked for the district for 18 years and is a truck driver, picking up garbage from the district's 60-plus parks. His goal as president is to unite the local and ensure fairness for every member.

The contract also strengthens union rights for the seasonal employees, which Guzman points out, "keeps our union stronger."

Negotiations were led by Council 31 Staff Representative Norm Neely. Guzman was joined on the bargaining team by Andy Jacobo (Vice President), Marcia Hurley (Secretary) and Ted Woolsey.

"Everyone is happy with what we've accomplished together," Guzman said. "That's why we're a union. It's a team effort and we're all united to make sure everyone is getting their fair share."

Fairness and solidarity in Joliet

AFSCME LOCAL 791 AT Joliet Park District stuck together and secured a five-year contract with annual raises and a new, higher pay scale for seasonal employees.

Year-round employees will receive more than 15% in raises over the five years. And seasonal employees will see their pay scale significantly upgraded and their years of service rewarded.

"We were asking for fair

Building a better future at Smith Village

SOME 200 EMPLOYEES AT Smith Village nursing home in Chicago, members of AFSCME Local 919, won a new union contract where everyone in the unit saw their pay increase and



AFSCME Local 791 President Eddie Guzman (right) and Vice President Andy Jacobo at the Joliet Park District.

the starting wage went from \$15.75 to \$19 an hour.

President Sheila Jenkins said successful negotiations were due to the improved relationship with management.

“Nursing homes took a hit in the pandemic and we’re still reeling,” Jenkins said. “We came together and got on the same page because we knew we needed to move the facility into the future. To attract the next generation of staff and hold on to them.”

Jenkins said word of the higher wages is already getting out and applications for employment at Smith Village have increased. “Now we’re competing with other nursing facilities in the area.”

Smith Village consists of three buildings with varying levels of care from independent living to skilled nursing and rehabilitation. Employees care for more than 100 residents.

Jenkins has been at Smith Village for 28 years, since she graduated from CNA school; now she’s in medical records. “Being here so long, I’ve taken care of some of the staff’s parents and grandparents. You build relationships with people and their families and it’s a real family atmosphere.”

Jenkins and Council 31 Staff Representative Edgar Diaz made up the small bargaining committee. Every employee in the unit saw their position’s pay go up by at least 7%—with some long-term employees seeing between 15-20% pay increases. The membership overwhelmingly ratified the contract.

Raising up in Streator

SMALL BUT MIGHTY, AFSCME Local 1592 represents public works employees at the city of Streator. The 12-person bargaining unit recently negotiated a contract with the city that will significantly increase wages for newer employees.

“There was such a big spread between the younger guys and the older guys and our goal was to bring them closer together,” said local President James Scudder. “We got the younger guys more than a four-dollar raise over the four-year agreement.”

Scudder said the group was united in their goal. They wanted to make sure newer employees were staying ahead



FRONTLINE HEROES DESERVE RESPECT!

Red Cross workers protect our country's vital blood supply. In ongoing national negotiations, employees are fighting management's proposal to roll back health care benefits and trying to address unsafe working conditions and severe understaffing. AFSCME Local 2691 members who work for Red Cross held a news conference in Peoria on May 9 as part of a National Day of Action.

of the minimum wage, especially considering the skilled labor they provide for the city.

“We do road repair, sewer maintenance, replace sidewalks, replace pavilions, cut down trees,” Scudder said. “We do our own plumbing, electrical, grade the alleys, do our own excavating. We do every trade you can name.”

Scudder said longer-term employees will see an average annual wage increase of 2.5% for each of the four years and a bonus tacked onto their base pay. They also secured contract language to benefit the

one part-time employee in the unit.

Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Dominic led negotiations for the union, along with President Scudder, Rob Gass, Anthony Over and Amy Ragusa.

Years of service rewarded

AT GLENKIRK ASSOCIATION, AFSCME Local 3534 members provide care and support to individuals with disabilities.

These DSPs and other frontline staff unanimously ratified their newest union contract.

The group won improved safety measures, extra sick time and strengthened union rights in the contract. They also secured the one dollar raise from the state six months before it will be allocated. But the most important thing, local President Lucinda Tyler said, is securing a wage scale tied to years of service. Some long-term employees will see a nearly 20% bump in their income as a result.

“Over time we’ve built a relationship with management,” Tyler said. “Negotiations were pleasant and respectful at the table. I’ve been in bargaining with them for a long time and it felt like they’re finally understanding the needs of the staff and not just the agency.”

A large part of that positive relationship is the fact that these employees work hard to help secure increased funding from the state, alongside fellow AFSCME members working as DSPs across Illinois. This past year, grassroots lobbying secured a \$1.00-per-hour increase, with language requiring employers to pass it directly to frontline employees.

“We had an excellent bargaining team and we’re proud of getting everyone above \$15 an hour,” Tyler said. “New hires come in making \$16 now and everyone else will be making more than that. If it wasn’t for the lobbying effort in Springfield, we wouldn’t get raises. We’ve gotten raises back-to-back and a lot of people will be very happy.”

The bargaining committee—led by Council 31 Staff Representative Erik Thorson and including Tyler and Kristin Kirkegaard—also secured contract language expanding employees’ rights to time off for union business and allowing them to lobby legislators at the worksite. 



AFSCME Local 3534 members, frontline disability workers at Glenkirk Association, unanimously ratified their new contract.

SHORT REPORTS



AFSCME Local 2073 members from Logan Correctional Center celebrate unity—and winning the softball tourney.

Solidarity Summer

SUMMER 2022 IS A WELCOME season after what feels like a very long winter. To celebrate and strengthen the tremendous solidarity that's helped AFSCME members get through the last two years, local unions are holding special Solidarity Summer events.

Across the state, local unions will be building connections by hosting picnics, barbecues, parking lot food truck parties, ice cream socials, and tailgate parties and tabling at worksites.

AFSCME Local 2073 at Logan Correctional Center kicked off the program with a softball tourney and cookout in June (pictured above).



Veronica Lea

AFSCME member is Illinois' 2022 DSP of the Year

VERONICA LEA HAS BEEN A direct support professional (DSP) for 30 years. She works at Trinity Services, Inc., helping senior women with intellectual

and developmental disabilities.

Lea works hard at her job, and she works hard on behalf of her fellow union members. She serves as secretary-treasurer for AFSCME Local 2690 and has lobbied members of the Illinois General Assembly to secure better wages for frontline workers at community disability agencies in Illinois.

This year, Trinity nominated Lea for the annual American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) award for Illinois DSP of the Year. ANCOR selected her from a pool of hundreds of nominees. Lea traveled to Miami to receive the award this spring.

"Veronica regularly goes beyond the call of duty to best support the individuals in their home," Trinity said in a statement. "Veronica's attention to detail and diligence in reporting has helped prevent serious medical issues," ANCOR said in its program for the awards event. "Thanks to Veronica's attentive, tailored supports, people are living fuller, healthier, and more independent lives."

"The recognition feels good, but I just love what I do," Lea said. "I'm passionate about my job because I'm taking care of people's loved ones. I want to treat them with love, kindness and respect. Like I would someone of my own family."

DSPs in Illinois are working demanding amounts of overtime because agencies can't hire and retain dedicated staff at the low wages they offer. COVID has exacerbated that problem, sometimes requiring staff to live in the group homes with the residents for weeks at

a time because the individuals need 24-hour care.

Lea and her fellow union members have been advocating for higher wages—and winning them—for years.

"When we're unified all together," Lea said, "we're powerful. We've educated legislators, we're making noise, and they're hearing us. It takes time, but we're getting there."

The passion that Lea has for her work and her clients is

palpable. "They know if you care. They can see it," Lea said. "You have to have compassion, commitment and a caring heart. When you have those three qualities, you go beyond the call of duty because it's the human thing to do."

Millions eligible for student loan forgiveness

A NEW ANALYSIS CONDUCTED by the Student Borrower Protection Center (SBPC) estimates that upwards of 9 million public service workers could be eligible for student debt forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program or PSLF, a federal student loan relief program.

AFSCME is partnering with SBPC and allies in the labor movement to increase awareness among public service workers about federal student loan relief under PSLF and ensure everyone who is eligible can benefit. AFSCME launched a student debt resource page (afscme.org/member-resources/student-debt-resources) to help public service

workers navigate the loan forgiveness program.

Participation in PSLF generally requires that the borrower have a federal Direct Loan, be employed by a qualified employer on a full-time basis and make 120 loan payments under a qualifying repayment plan. Upon meeting these requirements, the borrower's loans are to be forgiven.

But until recently, the process for qualifying for loan forgiveness under PSLF was so difficult that only a handful of public service workers got any relief. Then, in October 2021, the Biden administration created a temporary waiver program—which AFSCME advocated for—that drastically expanded the amount of public service workers who are eligible to have their debt forgiven.

But according to the SBPC analysis, only 2% of those eligible for the program have received the relief they have earned. The temporary waiver program is set to expire on Oct. 31, 2022, so borrowers must act fast to take advantage of it. In the meantime, AFSCME is calling for increased measures to help get the word out and extend the waiver deadline.

ALL TOGETHER
AFSCME 45th INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION • PHILADELPHIA

AFSCME HOLDS 45TH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Beginning July 11 in Philadelphia, AFSCME members will convene in person for AFSCME's 45th International Convention. It will be the first in-person convention in four years. The theme is aptly "All Together."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has largely kept us apart physically, but it has not broken our will," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "It has not sapped our power. It has not undermined our solidarity. And it most definitely has not stopped AFSCME members from doing the essential work that sustains our communities. Public services—and the dedicated, fearless people who provide them—are what have gotten the nation through this debilitating, once-in-a-century crisis."

With strict safety protocols in place, hundreds of delegates from councils and local unions across the country will gather together in Philadelphia and renew AFSCME's collective commitment to building worker power and growing our union.

"All Together at last, we will honor the sacrifice AFSCME members have made, celebrating extraordinary stories of public service workers who never quit," Saunders said.

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees represent at the PEOPLE conference in May.

Sub-chapter 86 members accept service award from a local food pantry.

Retirees ready to flex political muscle

“THIS NOVEMBER’S MID-TERM election is very important to the labor movement for various reasons,” said John Tilden, president of Sub-chapter 66 in Lake and McHenry counties. “It is not only that we must turn out to support candidates for office that pledge to preserve our benefits, but we also have an opportunity to enshrine in the state Constitution the right we currently have to organize a union by voting in favor of the Workers’ Rights Amendment.”

Tilden was one of nearly a hundred retirees who took part in the AFSCME PEOPLE conference in May where delegates voted to endorse candidates in June’s primary election.

Retirees are determined to support the Workers’ Rights Amendment, which will be on the ballot in the Nov. 8 General Election, because many of them were around before public

employees won the right to collectively bargain under Illinois law in 1984.

“We understand what it was like to be powerless against harassment and abuse by management,” said Mary Jones, vice president of Illinois Retirees Chapter 31, “and we do not want our children, grandchildren or any future generations to experience that injustice if we can prevent it.”

“When I took a job at the Department of Public Aid, management promoted people they liked and tried to get rid of anyone who wasn’t white,” said John Ormins, a retiree from Sub-chapter 73 based in Joliet. “When I was trying to organize a union, the pamphlets were stripped out of my hands and I was called a communist. But management continued to mistreat people and participation grew. Soon we had overwhelming support to have representation.”

Now AFSCME retirees are ready to make phone calls, knock on doors and do everything they can to get out the

vote and encourage people to vote YES for workers’ rights.

“We have an uphill battle against big-money groups who will try to muddy the water and convince people to vote against their interests,” Jones said. “We must encourage workers to stand united to protect themselves and their children against those who wish to strip the rights we have so doggedly worked to gain.”

Sub-chapter 86 gives back

THE SPRINGFIELD FIFTH Street Renaissance, a community organization that helps people in need throughout the Springfield area, recognized AFSCME Retiree Sub-chapter 86 with an award for their service and contributions to the organization’s food pantry.

“We are proud and humbled to be given an award for our contribution,” said Sub-chapter 86 President Don

Todd. “Our members recognize that many people do not have the resources that are required to provide for their basic needs, and we just wanted to do our best to help.”

Pictured receiving the award on behalf of Springfield-area Sub-chapter 86, left to right, are Liam McDonnell (executive board member), Debbie Williams of Fifth Renaissance, Don Todd (president), Tom Bolinger (secretary), and Alyson Hughes (vice president).

Supporting Murray Center

THE WARREN G. MURRAY Developmental Center is a state of Illinois residential facility that provides a home and care for individuals with developmental disabilities. Dedicated AFSCME Local 401 members work at this facility in Centralia, and AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees of Sub-chapter 85 continue to support the center.

In May, parents, staff, retirees, and residents celebrated the 51st year of the Murray Parents Association, which provides support for the center. Activities included a parade, the dedication of a new Memorial Garden, and a dance for the residents.

Sub-chapter 85 members took part in the celebration and purchased a brick to help fund the new Memorial Garden.

“AFSCME members are proud of the high quality of life and care that is provided to residents at Murray Center,” said David Ford, president of Sub-chapter 85 and a former staff member at the center.

“The strength of our union provides a stable workforce at Murray Center and that fact is directly related to making this an amazing facility for residents and the community.

“The memorial garden is a beautiful demonstration of the many lives that have been touched by the Murray Center,” Ford said. “We are proud to have helped create a safe home for those who need it.”



Sub-chapter 85 members take part in the anniversary celebration for the Warren G. Murray Developmental Center in Centralia.



How does your job provide a valuable public service?

The ball diamonds, the restrooms, the shelters, the parks, all the facilities are 100% clean and ready to go for the public when they come to use it. The public pay our salary, and they pay for the privilege of using the parks. And people really do appreciate it. They call and tell us. We take great pride in that.

Our union is absolutely instrumental to us. Stick together and we'll do better. We're always stronger together.

Does your union improve your workplace?

Our union is absolutely instrumental to us. Sometimes we don't see eye-to-eye with management, but we can always come to some kind of compromise. We're always stronger together. During our contract negotiations, we weren't making much headway. So we pulled our membership together and got 60 people at the board meeting. We stood together and told them, 'We work very hard—show us the respect we deserve.' The next day they decided to come back to the table. Stick together and we'll do better.

How has your union job helped your family?

I was a young kid when I started and the district kind of straightened me out. I've been here 24 years, been married 25 years. I've been able to raise four children, my youngest is now 16. I can provide very well for my family, and I take great appreciation for what the district and the union has done for me.

What's your favorite part of the job?

Fridays. Everything's finished for the week and looking top notch. It all flows right and everything is perfect. All the park district employees work very hard and I take great pride in that. 🏹

Joshua Milleville

AFSCME Local 2050

MAINTENANCE FOREMAN II

Tell us about your job at the Springfield Park District.

I run the entire north side of Springfield, doing all the day-to-day maintenance of the parks, mowing, weeding, everything that needs to be done. I love it. I'm not one to be cooped up too much, I enjoy being outside. Our whole team does it all. We do our own plumbing, electrical work, carpentry. We build our own shelters and restrooms. We have a zoo, a golf course, a botanical garden. We have the jewel of the district—Southwind Park, which is [an 80-acre] destination. We work for the district, but we are also caretakers for the public. That's ultimately who we work for.

What's your inspiration in this job?

I have a long history here. My wife's uncle and father started back in the 1980s. They both

served as union president. I started here at 19. You don't know anything and you rely on the older guys to look out for you. They definitely helped me. Now I do the same. We get younger guys through the door and they really need some training. And when you see them getting it, getting confidence, they become a valuable employee to the district. When you see them really invest time in this place, you want to see them succeed.

Our Local 2050 president, Jason Damhoff, passed unexpectedly from cancer last year. He was a great guy. He got along with everyone right from the beginning. He came in 2011 and before you know it was like he was with us for 20 years. I was VP and stepped up as president while he was fighting his cancer. He always fought so hard for us. Our forestry department is going to plant a tree in his honor later this summer. It will be right near his home. Everybody misses our buddy Jason. It's been hard.