

# ON THE

# MOVE



## University Workers Take Action—and Win

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**ON THE MOVE**

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

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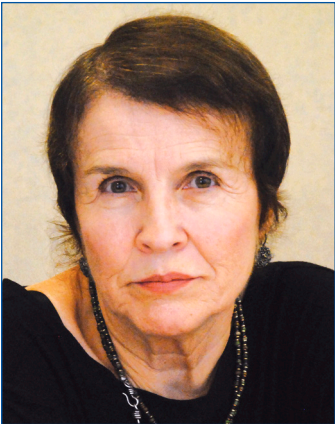
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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

# The super-rich are getting richer every day

*And we're paying the price*



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

INSTEAD OF INFLATION, WHAT WE'RE EXPERIENCING IS BETTER CALLED CORPORATE "GREEDFLATION."

Over the past year, we've seen so many AFSCME members make remarkable progress in round after round of contract negotiations. But those gains haven't come easy and often we've had to mobilize and fight for every dime.

And we're not the only ones. Screen actors and writers were out on strike for months in order to secure contracts that enabled them to continue to earn a living in a sector that is increasingly reliant on artificial intelligence. Auto workers spent weeks on the picket lines in their "rolling" strike that compelled the Big Three automakers to share more of the robust profits they'd been reeling in. And hotel workers, health care workers and many others followed suit.

It's not accidental that more and more workers are insisting on a better standard of living. We're all tired of watching the super-rich rake in obscene sums without any signs of stopping.

The world's five richest men are now worth a combined \$869 billion—an unimaginable hoard of wealth they've more than doubled in the last four years alone.

American billionaires are \$1.6 trillion richer today than they were in 2020.

Seven of the globe's 10 largest corporations—together worth more than \$10 trillion—are owned or run by a billionaire.

And the 148 top corporations worldwide made a record-smashing \$1.8 trillion in profits in the year from July 2022 to June 2023 alone.

That's all according to "Inequality Inc.," a report issued in January by the global charity Oxfam.

And it's a zero-sum game. Every dollar vacuumed up by corporate greed and into the portfolios of the super-rich is a dollar that comes directly out of the pockets of the rest of us.

### How we got here

A time-honored way of squeezing workers is by sending jobs overseas, such as to China or Mexico, where workers make meager wages and few have any organized voice.

More recently, corporations have hidden behind the idea of inflation. But higher prices don't just happen; they're the result of conscious decisions by corporate executives who decide what they will charge.

In theory, prices are supposed to reflect the cost of doing business, but in the real world of the last few years, price hikes are actually being driven by corporate profiteering. During the pandemic, "corporations were quick to pass on their rising costs to consumers," but as costs have dropped since, "they are surprisingly less quick to pass on their savings," according to a recent report.

Instead of inflation, what we're experiencing is better called corporate "greedflation."

Still not satisfied, the world's two richest men are now trying to weaken the rights of workers by invalidating the landmark law that provides collective bargaining rights to private sector employees. In separate legal proceedings, Tesla CEO Elon Musk (who has a net worth of \$180 billion) and Amazon owner Jeff Bezos (\$114 billion) are making the same argument: that both the National Labor Relations Act and the National Labor Relations Board (which administers the Act) are unconstitutional.

### Fighting back

How can working people fight back? By coming together in our unions and voting together for pro-worker candidates.

More and more people are recognizing that they need union representation. And even those who aren't yet joining unions recognize the vital role that unions play in tilting the scales away from gargantuan profits for billionaires and toward a better standard of living for working people. Support for unions has been rising for a decade, up to 67% in a recent Gallup poll.

The finding "confirms what we've known for a long time: Americans believe in the power of unions to strengthen our economy and improve the lives of working people," AFSCME International President Lee Saunders said.

President Biden is working to tilt those scales in our favor too. He's calling out greedflation, spotlighting the sneaky practice in his recent State of the Union address. "Too many corporations raise prices to pad their profits, charging more and more for less and less," the President said.

He's also working to bring good jobs back to America. "Manufacturers have poured roughly \$220 billion over the last 18 months into manufacturing construction on Biden's watch," Politico reported in January. "New factories will eventually make the car parts, computer chips and construction materials that the U.S. has long relied on foreign countries to provide."

And President Biden is pushing tax and budget changes that would help restore some balance to the economy by requiring the super-rich to do their share. "No billionaire should pay a lower tax rate than a teacher, a sanitation worker, a nurse," he said in the State of the Union speech.

Corporate greed and billionaire wealth can feel like a runaway train, but we're making progress. And we can't stop now. It's critically important to keep standing together, building our own union stronger, and winning better contracts for ourselves. So is ensuring that we work on every front to elect political leaders who will stand solidly on the side of America's working families.



# SIUE administrative workers take “monumental step forward”

**A**fter a contract campaign that took more than 600 days of direct action, the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville administrative employees of AFSCME Local 2887 have won a contract that values their dedication to the university.

The new contract was ratified by an overwhelming majority of members.

“We feel unstoppable,” said Local 2887 President Julie LaTempt-Brazier.

In a letter to members following the agreement’s ratification, the Local 2887 bargaining committee wrote that the new contract “represents a monumental step forward and contains some of the biggest gains our local has ever achieved.”

Among those gains is an \$1,800 ratification bonus in recognition of the extreme length of time spent at the

bargaining table and the implementation of a first-ever wage scale that guarantees workers will pay will go up with their years of service.

On average, wages will rise 15.5% over the life of the four-year agreement, with the lowest wage earners getting the largest increases of up to 21% in the second year of the contract alone.

SIUE employees achieved these gains through a series of actions that ramped up the pressure on university administration to settle.

The last push included a

two-pronged Day of Action that took place on Feb. 8—Day 588 without a contract. That morning, AFSCME members and their allies from other unions and community groups marched through campus buildings on their way to a meeting of the university board of trustees, where they spoke out and called for the administration to end the long delays.

Later that evening, they opened the second front. In St. Louis, the university’s chancellor was hosting a gala fundraiser for SIUE donors and alumni; union members—including from other AFSCME locals in the area who came out to show their solidarity—picketed on the streets outside.

Workers kept their foot on the gas. On Feb. 23—Day 603 without a contract—they sent yet another message. A large rock that sits in the campus’ quad that is used as a canvas for students and staff



SIUE workers picket outside a university fundraising gala on Feb. 8.

to send messages was painted in vibrant AFSCME green. In block letters, they stenciled: “Day 603.” It was just three days later—Day 606—that the bargaining committee reached a tentative agreement.

“This contract was won on the ground,” LaTempt-Brazier said. “It was won at the board of trustees meetings. There was nothing that could have stopped us.”

The bargaining committee

include LaTempt-Brazier, Vice President Amy Bodenstab, Executive Board Member Yvonne Jeffries and Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Whalen.

*NEWSFLASH:* SIUE building service workers of AFSCME Local 2232 also reached a tentative agreement just as *On the Move* went to print. Ratification meetings are pending. More information in our next issue. 🐉

## EIU workers take action to win fair contract

**I**t took nine months at the bargaining table, picketing by employees frustrated over low pay and the slow pace of negotiations, and the involvement of a federal mediator, but Eastern Illinois University employees have won a new union contract that makes significant strides toward improving wage levels and provides paid parental leave for the first time, among other provisions.

About 180 EIU building service, clerical, food service and other workers are represented by AFSCME Local 981.

Union members had taken to the streets in their fight for fairness, demonstrating outside meetings of the university board of trustees and gaining support from students and the broader public.

“For nine months, we stayed united and fought hard for long overdue wage increases and crucial benefits for ourselves and our families. Together we won an agreement that takes important steps in the right direction,” said Kim Pope, an office manager in the EIU College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, and the president of

AFSCME Local 981.

Throughout bargaining, Local 981 had members line the halls leading to the negotiating table. During each negotiation session, members stood behind the bargaining team to send a message of unity to management.

The contract raises wages by 15 to 24% across the board over its four-year term, with the lowest-paid employees seeing an immediate 13% increase as minimum pay goes to \$16.

The union bargaining team made a specific effort to improve shift differentials that had been stagnant for years, and they succeeded. The second-shift differential is increased to \$1.05 an hour,



Members of Local 981 stand behind their bargaining committee before management enters a negotiations session.

and the third-shift differential for food court, moving and clerical employees is increased to \$1.25 an hour.

Throughout negotiations, the team held firm on parental leave. Management initially demanded a provision under which any employee taking such leave would have to sign a promissory note; if they didn’t stay at the university for a full year after returning from leave, they would have to repay the cost of their four weeks. The

union argued that this demand discriminated against women, who are far more likely to leave the workforce after they’ve had a child.

“Nobody should have to think about paying the university back when they’ve just had a child,” Pope said. “We were able to get rid of the strings, so the benefit is available to everyone in the union. That was a really proud moment.”

Local 981’s new contract also restores parity pay for

clerical-technical employees, strengthens protections for workers against harassment on the job and allows more leeway for remote work where possible.

The bargaining team consisted of Pope, Michelle Burnside, Jim Guymon, Kenny Keyser, Leslie McLean, Wendy Lane, Tris Bennett, Dino Cohoon, Tony Willenborg, Andy Eggers, Lisa Guymon and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel. 🐉

# Tier 2: Your questions answered

**Q: Which Illinois public sector pension funds have two tiers of benefits?**

**A:** All of them! SERS, SURS, TRS, IMRF, Cook County, City of Chicago (actually has three), and all police and firefighter funds.

**Q: Why are lawmakers so reluctant to address the injustice of these two-tiered pension systems?**

**A:** State and local government lawmakers have severely underfunded major pension funds for decades as a strategy to balance their budgets without raising any new revenues, leading to high debt among those funds.

**Q: How do I know if I have a Tier 2 pension?**

**A:** If you were hired by any state or local government agency on or after Jan. 1, 2011, you are on a Tier 2 pension. This was the effective date of the law that was rammed through the General Assembly over fierce opposition from AFSCME and other unions in 2010.

Most people with a Tier 2 pension will have to work seven years longer than those with a Tier 1 pension to collect an unreduced benefit, even though employees in both tiers contribute the same amount from every paycheck. The final average salary calculation used to determine the dollar amount of pension benefits is also lower for Tier 2 participants.

**Q: I have a Tier 1 pension. Why does this affect me?**

**A:** Tier 2 inequity affects everyone, even those on Tier 1. Tier 2 exacerbates the staffing crisis; the later retirement age and comparably worse benefit dissuade new hires from staying in public service jobs until retirement. That results in staffing shortages that can make many workplaces—prisons, jails and mental health and developmental centers, and other high-risk environments—much less safe. The voices of Tier 1 employees will be essential to shining a light on the inequity of Tier 2. No matter what tier pension you have, we’re all AFSCME members—and we must fight together if we are going to prevail.

**Q: How can we move lawmakers to make Tier 2 fairer?**

**A:** If AFSCME members throughout the state join with members of other public sector unions to voice our concerns about the inadequacy of Tier 2 retirement benefits, we will be impossible to ignore. To do so we must remain united, determined and willing to take strong action. In the coming months there will be many ways AFSCME members will need to get involved, including calling and emailing their legislators directly.

## AFSCME testifies on need for pension action

**A**t hearings in the state Capitol, Council 31 is making the case to lawmakers that legislative action to improve Tier 2 pensions is urgently needed, and that such action will not only benefit employees, but all public bodies that are struggling to recruit and retain staff.

On Feb. 22, Council 31 Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Joanna Webb-Gauvin told lawmakers on the House Pension Committee that if they want to get serious about fixing the staffing crisis in state and local government, they need to get serious about fixing Tier 2 pensions and restoring the promise of retirement security. “Addressing Tier 2

inequities alone isn’t likely to be sufficient to solve the staffing crisis but it is certainly an important component,” Webb-Gauvin testified. “Studies of the unprecedented number of job openings in the public sector conclude that applicants are in part looking for employment opportunities that include adequate retirement benefits. “And studies of the current

workforce conclude that, due to the diminishment of benefits and changes to pension systems across the country, 81 percent of public sector workers are concerned about having enough income in their retirement.”

AFSCME laid out for the committee the dire effects the staffing crisis has on workers in the public service. In surveys conducted by Council 31 in the fall of 2022, state employees reported that the staffing crisis has resulted in declining mental health, being put in dangerous situations without enough staff and missing important family events and milestones.

The toll it takes on communities is just as great, such as school districts delaying the start of school because they don’t have enough bus drivers, or local

libraries cutting programs that they have no one to administer. One way to start easing that burden on workers and the communities they serve is to restore the promise of a fair retirement benefit to get more applicants in the door.

“There’s little doubt in anyone’s mind that the inadequacy and unfairness of the Tier 2 pension benefit contributes to the difficulty of recruitment and retention of employees at all levels of government,” Webb-Gauvin continued. “It used to be that the retirement security offered by Tier 1 benefits would help to keep employees invested in state employment, but the Tier 2 benefit level just isn’t sufficient to provide that same motivation.”

In closing her remarks, Webb-Gauvin said our union



**Council 31 Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Joanna Webb-Gauvin testifies before the House Pension Committee.**

is urging that the General Assembly “not delay any longer and focus efforts on addressing the inequity and inadequacy of Tier 2 pension benefits.”

# AFSCME, lawmakers raise concerns about plans for Stateville, Logan

The Department of Corrections plan to demolish Stateville and Logan Correctional Centers and build new facilities in their place brought a host of questions from both AFSCME and lawmakers throughout the state.

The department did not seek or consider the input of front-line employees or the union in the development of the plan, announced March 15.

“We have grave concerns,” said Roberta Lynch, executive director of AFSCME Council 31. “Closing facilities even temporarily would disrupt and potentially destabilize the prison system, while bringing upheaval to the lives of affected employees and indi-

viduals in custody.”

of dollars of deferred maintenance, the information released by the department so far raises many more questions than it answers.

In a Council 31 news release, the union pressed the state to answer a number of those questions, including:

- If both facilities are closed for reconstruction, where will offenders be relocated in a way that does not destabilize other facilities?



currently house male offenders—or overcrowding the only other women’s facility—poses logistical and safety concerns.

- The plan would result in the layoff of all employees at both facilities. Although the department claims that positions would be available for these employees at other facilities, how far away would these positions be? IDOC is already finding it extremely difficult to hire and retain employees. This plan could all too easily drive staffing levels so low that the entire system would be destabilized.

- Are there truly no other alternatives to razing these facilities and rebuilding on the exact same site? Stateville grounds encompass some 2,200 acres, Logan 150 acres. Why not build new facilities elsewhere on the grounds while utilizing the existing facilities in the interim? Could rebuilding on the exact location require remediating environmental hazards caused by demolition?

- Stateville is valued for its

proximity to the Chicago area, allowing individuals in custody to more easily stay connected to their family members in the state’s largest population center. Logan’s central location offers efficient access to transport offenders to legal, medical and other mandatory appointments in any part of the state.

“We cannot support this plan unless and until the department provides satisfactory answers to these compelling questions,” Lynch said.

As *On the Move* went to print, the department had not done so.

Elected officials have already begun to push back. In a joint statement from lawmakers representing Logan’s district, State Sen. Sally Turner, State Rep. Bill Hauter, Logan County Board Chairman Emily Davenport and Lincoln Mayor Tracy Welch, called the department’s announcement “devastating and infuriating.”

“While we recognize that Logan Correctional is in need of repairs, it is only in

its current state of disrepair because of neglect and the misplaced priorities of this administration,” their statement reads. “[...] We will continue to fight for each and every one of these jobs and ensure our communities get the answers they deserve.”

Sen. Rachel Ventura, who represents parts of Joliet near Stateville, expressed concerns about the potential disruption to the entire prison system and the lives of the corrections staff who work there if the state is allowed to follow through on its plans.

“As you can imagine, hiring for correctional officers right now has been very difficult and my fear is that if we lose these jobs, even temporarily, we may not be able to get some of these employees back,” Ventura told the Chicago Tribune. “And so I want to make sure that we do everything in our power that, as we are building these new buildings, that we are safeguarding families who are here.”



Stateville employees are represented by AFSCME Local 1866, and Logan employees, by AFSCME Local 2073.

While there is no question that both prisons are in dire need of tens of millions

Stateville primarily houses maximum-security offenders. Logan is one of only two facilities that house women and the only facility for medium- and maximum-security female offenders; placing this population at other facilities that

## String of assaults show need for better safety measures

Staff at Western Illinois and Lawrence Correctional Centers have experienced a string of assaults on staff—10 at Western alone—since Jan. 1. Local leaders have grown more concerned about the lack of accountability when staff are assaulted and a situation that is spiraling rapidly out of control.

At the beginning of March, two Western officers were assaulted outside the dietary hall. One officer’s face was swollen, bruised and cut.

Just two weeks later, a lieutenant, officer and food supervisor in the dietary hall were assaulted while a fight

simultaneously occurred just outside the hall. In that instance, the lieutenant suffered bruised ribs which resulted in breathing trouble. The food supervisor’s face was swollen after being hit.

On March 18, an officer at Lawrence was hospitalized

after he was beaten to the ground, where the offender stomped his head. He suffered a concussion and was left with the offender’s boot print on the side of his face.

Josh Eichelberger is president of AFSCME Local 3567 at Western, which represents the 380 security, administrative and education staff at the prison. He said that the first step that IDOC must take is ensuring that offenders who hurt staff are disciplined.

“Holding the offenders accountable for their actions would be an excellent start,” Eichelberger said. “Once they know there are actual consequences, it would hold.”

Local 3567 requested all

of the video footage and documentation of the assaults from prison leadership but were denied access, with management citing ongoing investigations.

In labor-management meetings, Council 31 continues to press IDOC for action plans to keep staff safe from assaults that have become more difficult to manage as correctional employees are asked to do more with less staff.

Eichelberger said the frequency of assaults is unusual for this time of year. Staff fear what’s to come this summer.

“It’s been a pretty wild start to the year,” Eichelberger



Correctional Sergeant Dustin Belcher with the offender’s boot print on his face.

said. “It’s been nonstop lockdowns and assaults on staff. It would seem it’s spiraling in a direction that’s not good.”

“It’s a completely unacceptable situation,” said Council 31 Labor Relations Specialist Chuck Stout. “Management just doesn’t seem to be concerned about the increasingly dangerous conditions at state prisons.”

# AFSCME member returns resident's priceless heirloom

**D**avid Block has always had an eagle eye. His coworkers in the city of DeKalb Public Works Department joke that he could spot a penny on the side of the highway at 80 mph.

But Block's keen sight was about to do more than help him get one cent richer. Block, a member of AFSCME Local 813, was going to return a DeKalb resident's priceless family heirloom against all odds.

As snow fell on the city in early winter, local resident Rich Kakkuri slipped and fell while walking around town. When hours later he realized that he had lost his car keys in the slip, it was too late for any hope of finding them.

Worse than the lost keys was the heirloom he carried on the keychain. His grandfather served in the Army in World War II, and ever since his passing, Kakkuri carried his grandfather's dog tag to honor his service and sacrifice.

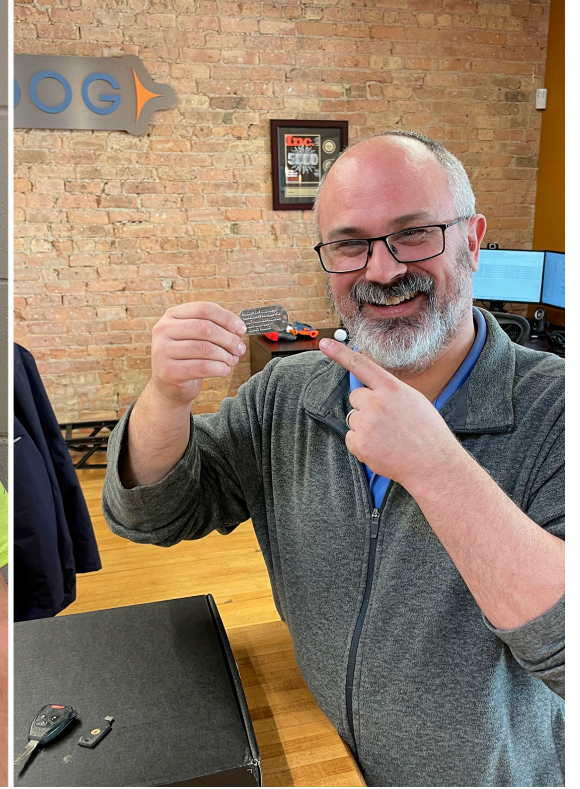
He had little hope they would be returned, but called

the Department of Public Works anyways to see if they had found them. City workers had already plowed the snow he slipped on and hauled it away. It looked like the dog tag was gone forever.

This winter, countless tons of snow were plowed off DeKalb city streets, pushed into enormous piles, loaded into trucks, and hauled to a remote area on the outside of town where it's dumped until the spring sun could melt it away. Finding the dog tag there would be like the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Regardless, the public works employees would do their best. With most of the piles melted by February, Block went out to the mile-long road where the snow was dumped to scour it for anything of importance.

He walked for hours,



DeKalb resident Rich Kakkuri (right) with the dog tag recovered by Local 813 member David Block (left).

staring down at the ground, hoping to find the key ring. He succeeded in finding five sets of keys—but no dog tag.

He was about to call it a day when he saw a shiny piece of metal about an inch long laying in the middle of the road.

"I just went nuts," Block said. "I was all out there alone, jumping up and down and yelling. I couldn't believe I found it."

The Department of Public Works returned the dog tag to Kakkuri, who was astonished

and appreciative of the fact that they were able to recover it.

"I've found all sorts of things—diamond rings and cash in the sewers," Block said. "But this was the most valuable thing I've ever been able to return to someone." 🦋

# AFSCME-backed bill would put brakes on selling, closing public nursing homes

**S**tate legislation supported by AFSCME Council 31 would give county residents a stronger voice on questions of sales or closures of nursing homes. HB 5537 would also require counties to be more transparent about the negative effects those sales or closures could have on the community.

In recent years, venture capitalists have increasingly viewed county-owned nursing homes as attractive targets.

This problem has manifested itself at county homes such as in DeKalb County, where workers are represented by AFSCME Local 3537. A potential sale of that facility was nixed by the county board when it was revealed that a previously rejected buyer had

concealed its ownership structure and would have become the home's majority owner.

County homes are vitally important, especially for Illinois seniors. Accessible to all, regardless of income or ability to pay, public nursing homes ensure that older individuals have the opportunity to age in their communities, close to their loved ones and important landmarks in

their lives, without financial considerations.

County homes are also particularly important for Illinois' Medicaid population, which is underserved by for-profit and non-profit nursing homes, and for rural seniors, who have fewer options for long-term care.

Sponsored by Rep. Yolanda Morris (D-Chicago) and Sen. Maurice West (D-Rockford), the bill would require any county considering selling its home to issue a report on the community impact and be more transparent about the would-be buyer.

The bill would further eliminate the prospect of any backroom political deals by forcing all potential sales, closures or leases to be voted on in a public referendum, so voters in the county can have their voices heard. 🦋



# Hill CC member builds all-new apprenticeship program

*Offenders can now get certified in aquaponics*

**A** member of AFSCME Local 1274 has pioneered a first-of-its-kind vocational program at Hill Correctional Center that recently won federal approval to serve as a template for correctional apprenticeship programs nationwide.

Anthony Wallace has been a corrections vocational instructor at Hill Correctional Center since 2018. When he first took the position, he was teaching offenders how to work in a meat-processing facility.

With little potential for post-prison employment in that field, IDOC wanted to move towards a new type of career training program. Wallace saw an opportunity to do something bold. He was given the choice of what kind of program he wanted to set up, and he settled on something that

no other prison in Illinois is doing: aquaponics.

It's a style of food production combining hydroponics and aquaculture. Plants are raised in the same tanks as edible fish. They act symbiotically; the fish feed on nutrients released by the plants, which in turn absorb waste from the fish.

"I wanted to do something different," Wallace said. "And aquaponics is very different."

So he set off researching, designing the system and gathering the parts and equipment needed to run it. He was able to

repurpose old pieces of equipment that were laying around the facility; Wallace estimates that 80% of the system is reused or recycled.

Now that Hill's new aquaponics greenhouse is up and running, the individuals in custody perform routine checks of the system, plant vegetables, care for the fish (a hybrid bluegill), inspect the sump pumps to make sure they're working as expected, and take samples of the water and soil to keep them healthy.

"I watch them do the work and they don't even treat it like work," Wallace said. "They can't wait to get into the greenhouse every day to see how the plants are doing, or to see if the tomatoes are ripened, or to see how the fish are doing."

He had chosen aquaponics because of the promising future of the field. In North America, it's currently a \$1.2 billion industry and expected to grow by nearly 10% per year over the next decade, meaning the need




The new aquaponics greenhouse at Hill Correctional Center.

for aquaponics technicians will also grow.

Given that need, Wallace hoped the program could be turned into a bona fide apprenticeship, where the individuals could get certified in aquaponics and find a rewarding career in the field when they re-enter society.

When Wallace got the word that the U.S. Department of

Labor approved the apprenticeship program, he was through the roof. The individuals in the program were just as excited.

"They were happy that they were going to receive a certificate for their efforts in the greenhouse," he said. "It means a lot to them to show their families that they are here working on themselves and learning a new skill." 

## Larry Marquardt Scholarship Applications Open Now



Larry Marquardt was a tireless organizer and union leader who dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people. He was the first executive director of AFSCME Council 31, serving in that position until his death in 1980. In his memory, Council 31 has established a scholarship fund which offers AFSCME members and their children financial assistance for higher education.

**Apply by  
April 19**

**Visit [AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships](https://AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships)  
to download the application**

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# Governor's recommended 2025 budget in

In his annual address to a joint session of the General Assembly on Feb. 21, Gov. JB Pritzker presented his recommended budget for the coming 2025 fiscal year that starts July 1.

AFSCME's legislative affairs team in Springfield is monitoring the budget process at every step and advocating for a responsible budget that works for union members.

Following is a summary of the proposal's key points of interest to AFSCME members.

## State government

The proposed budget makes a significant investment in the state's workforce while acknowledging the severity of the ongoing staffing crisis. The governor recommends an increase in total headcount of 2.1%, or 1,299 positions, mostly driven by large increases in personnel in the Departments of Children and Family Services and Veterans' Affairs.

The spending plan includes funding for 9,000 positions that are currently vacant. Investing in these positions must be accompanied by an increased effort to recruit, hire and retain staff to fill them.

## Department of Children and Family Services

In his speech, Gov. Pritzker noted that DCFS workers are often treated as "a punching bag for larger societal issues.

"They work long hours, and on occasion, these heroic workers have been the subject of threats and violence," Pritzker said. "I want them to know that I see them—that I see their work—and that I am incredibly grateful for their service."

The line was met by a standing ovation from nearly everyone in attendance, and Pritzker's spending plan backed up his praise.

DCFS's total budget is set for an increase of 16.3% over last year's, largely driven by the addition of 392 positions, mostly on the front lines, including 133 new child welfare workers and 259 new child protection workers.

It also includes a 20.7% increase—\$62.1 million—in funding for residential child welfare agencies.

## Department of Corrections

The budget for the Department of Corrections remains mostly flat compared to the current year. It includes a targeted headcount of 12,643, which is an increase of 413 budgeted positions—although the department is being optimistic about its hiring capabilities, as the current total headcount is well below that number.

IDOC also budgeted a \$2 million increase in repair and maintenance funding to address smaller, deferred maintenance projects of under \$100,000.

## Department of Human Services

The total budget for the Department of Human Services has risen significantly since fiscal year 2023. The fiscal year 2025 budget represents a 13.2% increase, with the total recommended appropriation coming in at \$14.2 billion.

The governor proposes funding increases for state-operated developmental centers (SODCs) and state-operated mental health centers (SOMHCs). The increase amounts to approximately 15% for SODCs and 7% for SOMHCs.

The DHS budget falls short in that it only maintains this year's wage increases for direct support professionals (DSPs) in state-funded nonprofit agencies, but doesn't

propose an increase for next year. This makes our union's current campaign to raise DSP wages even more important.

## Department of Juvenile Justice

The DJJ budget would increase 9.75% over the current year, largely driven by the cost of opening the newly renovated Illinois Youth Center at Lincoln. Agency headcount would rise by 119 positions.

## Department of Veterans' Affairs

The fiscal year 2025 budget represents a 10.8% spending boost for DVA, largely due to a substantial increase in headcount of 564 positions, mostly concentrated in frontline positions. While vacancies still remain a serious problem in DVA, the department stressed its eagerness to recruit workers to fill those new positions.

## Department of Public Health

While the governor's proposed budget reduces IDPH funding by 16.6%, largely due to the drying up of federal COVID-19 funds, the number of budgeted positions is set to increase by 118.

## Higher education

Spending earmarked for higher education would remain mostly unchanged from the current budget. The governor included only a modest increase of \$24.6 million for general operating costs at public universities—not nearly enough to address longstanding wage inequities for administrative, clerical, building service and other workers.



# d summary



**2.1%**

**Increase in total headcount  
in state government**

**9000**

**Vacant positions still budgeted for**

**\$322**

**million Increase in state's  
pension contributions**

Pushing for more funding earmarked for university employee wages is another AFSCME priority this spring.

### **Local government**

The budget plan does little to help local governments, failing to restore the Local Government Distributive Fund to its previous level and cutting the grocery tax which provided an income boost to municipalities.

### **K-12 education**

School funding is a key priority in this budget, with the second year of \$400 million in funding for Smart Start Illinois, a program that increases access to preschool, as well as a \$350 million investment in K-12 education.

### **Pensions**

The governor would fully fund the state's pension contributions at \$10.1 billion, an increase of \$322 million over the current year. Pritzker also stated his intention to increase the overall funding goal from the current 90% by 2045 to 100% by 2048.

## **DSPs LAY GROUNDWORK IN SPRINGFIELD**

A small group of direct support professionals (DSPs) who work in community disability agencies went to Springfield in February to make early contact with legislators ahead of the major statewide lobby day on May 8. Speaking to lawmakers earlier in the session will help keep the issue front and center in their mind as the budget process continues.



# Union wins grievances on out-of-position work, shift bidding

## Justice for member doing another position's work

AFSCME Local 805 member Katie Lokaitis is a public service administrator in the Illinois Department of Public Health's Office of Preparedness and Response. She's responsible for overseeing 11 different types of EMT and EMS licenses, and the licensing of emergency response vehicles like fire trucks, ambulances and aircraft used in medical airlifts.

Many thousands of pieces of equipment need to be licensed, and the records of those licenses maintained in accordance with the law. It takes a large and complex software database to keep track of it all.

Lokaitis came to the state with a background in health care, not IT. Yet her supervisor said it was her job to run complicated tests and back-end maintenance on the software system.

She couldn't have been expected to have the skills needed; after all, these tests and maintenance weren't in her position's job description. And



Public Service Administrator and Local 805 member Katie Lokaitis.

doing the tasks would take her much longer than they would take someone who did have those skills.

In fact, a different job title had traditionally done the work,

but after the previous person resigned, management decided to foist its work on Lokaitis rather than hire a replacement.

She explained her situation to her Local 805 steward, who

saw she was right and filed a grievance on her behalf.

An arbitrator ultimately agreed that the work she was performing was outside of her job duties. The additional IT functions are "beyond what could reasonably be expected of her position and the duties found in the position description", the arbitrator wrote.

After the decision, Lokaitis was relieved of all of those IT functions. She's happy with the outcome and glad she fought her way through.

## DJJ fails to bargain over shift-bidding rules

During negotiations for a new state of Illinois contract in 2012, the state made a proposal that would allow the employer to place limits on employees who could bid on new shifts. For example, if someone was out on leave when shift-bidding occurred, they would forfeit their bidding and bumping rights and be placed wherever the state wanted.

In the face of strong union

opposition, the proposal was quickly withdrawn. But that didn't stop the state from recently implementing it in the Department of Juvenile Justice's Aftercare Division.

Ryan Kilduff is chief steward for AFSCME Local 1964, which represents DJJ aftercare workers. Catching wind of the new policy, he promptly filed a grievance.

"It was unfair to our female aftercare agents because if they were out on maternity leave, they would lose their bump," Kilduff said.

Luckily, nobody had been negatively impacted by this rule—yet. But Kilduff worried that if left unchecked, the state could use it as a precedent and begin to impose it in other departments too.

The grievance went to arbitration, where an arbitrator ultimately agreed that the state had no right to impose such a rule without first bargaining with the union over it, and in doing so, had violated the AFSCME contract.

"We looked at the issue with a very common-sense attitude," Kilduff said. "We saw it wasn't right and the arbitrator saw it that way too." 

## Three AFSCME members secure seats on state pension board

AFSCME has always sought to strengthen Illinois' public pension funds by working to elect union members who will serve as a strong voice for frontline employees on pension fund boards.

These three candidates gathered enough signatures from fund participants to get on the ballot and to defend retirement security for state employees on the State Employees Retirement System (SERS) board. With no other candidates filing petitions for their seats, all three AFSCME members have been declared the winners of the races.



**Arnold Black** sits on the AFSCME Council 31 Executive Board and is the president of AFSCME Local 2971. Arnold was appointed to his seat on the SERS board in 2022 and has been a stalwart advocate ever since. He started his career with the state in 2006 as a Child Welfare Specialist and now serves as a Public Service Administrator with the Department of Children and Family Services.



**John Day** is the president of AFSCME Local 1048, a position he has held since 2017, and an AFSCME member since his first day at the Illinois Department of Revenue in 2012. John earned his bachelor's degree from Iowa State University and a master's from the University of Illinois-Springfield where he focused on public budgeting and finance. John is a Tier 2 SERS member and an outspoken advocate for protecting and improving public employee pension benefits.



**Cindia "Lynn" Fields** is the president of AFSCME Local 3654 at Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center and a 22-year employee of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Lynn successfully promoted through the ranks and is currently a lieutenant at SWCC. She's participated in numerous union leadership and training programs and is active in union organizing and lobbying efforts. Lynn is also a proud United States Army veteran, having served five years with the Military Police Corps.

# Museum of Contemporary Art workers form union with AFSCME

**T**he wave of union organizing among Chicago cultural workers just keeps rolling: Employees of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago filed for a union election with AFSCME Council 31 on March 13.

The new union—Museum of Contemporary Art Workers United (MCAWU/AFSCME)—will represent about 100 employees, including guest experience, building operations, curatorial, collections and exhibitions staff.

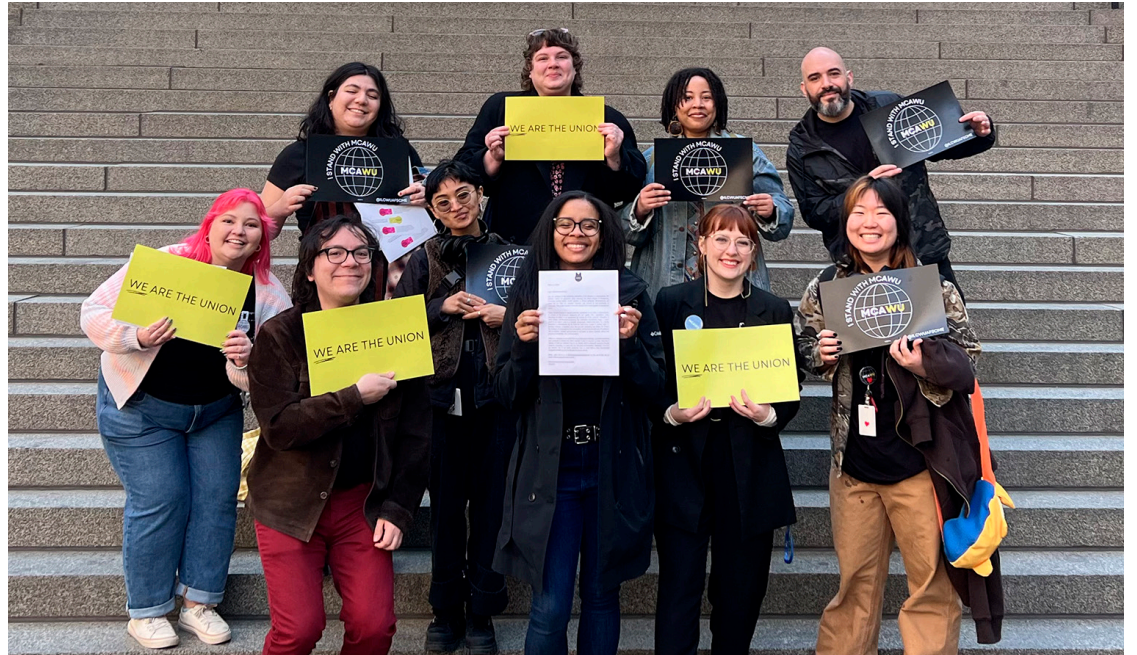
Citing a “cycle of staff burnout and turnover”, museum employees on the MCAWU/AFSCME organizing committee wrote that, “We believe there is a better way. ... We are part of a growing movement of cultural workers in and around Chicago and across the country who are ensuring that we have a seat at the table. We demand a voice in the decisions that are made for the future and well-being of the museum.”

Every museum employee deserves a voice on the job,

the letter states, along with adequate wages, equitable benefits, transparency from management and more.

“With the right to bargain collectively,” workers write, “we can meet leadership across the table as co-equals to determine our future [and] improve the quality of our working environment and museum.”

Lloyd-Princeton Cagné is a visitor experience associate at the MCA and a member of the union organizing committee. “I wanted greater transparency and accountability from leadership and management,” he told the Chicago Tribune. “There are a lot of decisions that are made that directly affect my job and my department and my co-workers, and we rarely if ever have a say in those decisions.”



Members of the Museum of Contemporary Art Workers United/AFSCME.

In the Art Newspaper, organizing committee member Olive Stefanski—the lead creative artist in the MCA’s Teen Creative Agency—said, “Forming a union gives us a chance to determine our own futures as workers at the MCA. Our union is a democratic process in which all workers can have the freedom to have a voice in the conditions of our own workplace.”

In the last two years, employees of the Art Institute of Chicago, staff and non-tenure-track faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and employees of the Field Museum, Museum of Science & Industry, Notebaert Nature Museum, Newberry Library and several suburban libraries have all formed unions as part of AFSCME’s nationwide Cultural

Workers United campaign.

Located near the “Miracle Mile” district of North Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago, the MCA is one of the largest modern art museums in the world. Opened in 1967, it maintains a permanent collection, presents special exhibits, artist talks, films and concerts, works with students and much more. 

## RETIRED COUPLE REFLECTS ON 40 YEARS OF POLITICAL VOLUNTEERING



**Peter and Theresa Mendoza**, both members of AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 60, have been married for 50 years. They’ve been volunteering together in support of pro-worker candidates for nearly as long.

Peter worked for 32 years at Stateville Correctional Center as a correctional officer. Theresa spent 30 years in the Chicago Department of Public Health. And in every election for decades, they hit the streets in support of AFSCME’s recommended candidates.

The Mendozas first became interested in social issues and union power during the United Farm Workers grape boycott led by Cesar Chavez in the late 1960s. In fact, Peter and Theresa met during a UFW boycott action staged outside a Chicago Jewel-Osco.


“That was how we got involved in social issues,” Theresa said. “We moved into political campaigns from there.”

“From there we got involved in the Harold Washington for mayor campaign [in 1983],” Peter said. “We learned the inner workings of a campaign, from the person who stuffs the envelopes to the person who knocks on doors.”

Well into their retirement, the couple still has the strength and vitality to help candidates who back working people, and they plan to keep going strong as long as they’re able.

“As long as I’m able to walk and talk, it’s important to keep active in politics,” Theresa said.

Working people need to rise up and let their voices be heard in the political arena, so that politicians know and understand our struggles, Peter said.

“Come out and march, come out and knock,” he urged. “It could help—maybe just a little bit now, but it could mean a lot down the road.” 

# ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

## Fulton Co. nursing home's new contract "life-changing"

A NEW CONTRACT FOR NURSING home employees in Fulton County is "life-changing" for the members of AFSCME Local 3433.

"The county nursing home has always prided itself on the fact that it never turned anyone away," said Local 3433 President Trudy Williams. "The majority of its residents used to be on public aid. They had no place to go."

Formally known as the Clayberg Nursing Center, the county-owned and operated facility has a homey atmosphere. Staff tend to people they've known their entire lives, counting their elementary school teachers, childhood neighbors and fellow church congregants among those they care for.

"It's a family environment," said Becky Wilson, a CNA who served on the union bargaining committee. "It's a comfortable place with a lot of history."

Staff and residents alike are hoping that this is the dawn of a new day for the home.

That history is felt deeply within the community. The home originally opened in 1969 after the county sold its poor farm to a strip-mining company. Without anywhere for the county's elderly to live, the community stepped in. A local family donated a plot of land on which the home was built in memory of their son, James Clayberg, an Air Force pilot who was killed in the Korean War.

Despite that rich history, the county has repeatedly threatened to sell the nursing home. In 2009, the county was threatening to sell to a for-profit company if the union didn't agree to freeze step increases. Knowing the terrible track records for-profit companies have when taking over public nursing homes, the local reluctantly agreed.



Members of AFSCME Local 3433 at the Clayberg Nursing Home in Fulton County have won a new contract that workers hope is the beginning of a new day at the home.

Just last summer, the county threatened again to sell the home. AFSCME members and outraged community residents rallied to prevent any prospect of a sale from going any further. They picketed outside the courthouse and spoke passionately at county board meetings. Walking the picket lines alongside them were seniors on walkers.

"Because of the history of this home, the residents of Fulton County know how important it is," Williams said.

Now, in their recently-ratified contract, step increases are back and better than they were when they were frozen. Staff and residents alike are hoping that this is the dawn of a new day for the home—a new day where threats of sales are a thing of the past.

Wages are going up at least 16% to as much as 39% across the board. CNAs are receiving an additional \$6.50 per hour wage increase on top of the base wages from new state funds.

"It's life-changing," Williams said. "Hopefully this contract has lifted the nursing home employees up and will make new employees come and want to stay."



From left: Delondria Howard-McDonald, Martha Stroger, Dorothy Smith and Irene Lusk of AFSCME Local 55.

The Local 3433 bargaining committee included Williams, Wilson, Mercedes Ellsworth, Becky May, Kyle Williams and Council 31 Staff Representative Tim Lavelle.

## Maryville Academy employees win "significant" wage increases

FOR THE MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 55 at Maryville Academy in Chicago, their new contract is the best so far.

The 100-plus members at Maryville Academy work with

troubled youth in the Chicago area ranging from ages 12 to 21. Many of them are wards of the state who have experienced serious trauma in their young lives. Local 55 members help them address that trauma and begin down the path towards recovery.

A youth care specialist and a member of the Local 55 bargaining team, Delondria Howard-McDonald has worked at Maryville for 22 years. The job is rewarding, she says, but not without its challenges.

Because of those challenges, staff wanted to fight for more vacation time, so they can reduce the burnout and ease the stress they face every day. They wanted personal days so any employee

feeling overwhelmed could take a breath without burning vacation. And critically, they needed wages that matched the demands they face every day and rewarded their commitment to Maryville's mission.

At the bargaining table, members of the union bargaining committee made impassioned arguments to management about their loyalty to Maryville and its mission. But, they added, that loyalty must be reciprocated.

"We pointed out to them that we are still sticking with you all because we all care about the clients and we want to make sure they're safe and treated fairly," Howard-McDonald said. "Because we're



The Local 197 bargaining committee after reaching a tentative agreement.

willing to stick with it with you all, we deserve a fair increase in pay.”

The local union succeeded in their determination to improve wages, securing across-the-board wage increases between 18 and 40% over the next two-and-a-half years.

“These are significant increases that people have never seen before,” Howard-McDonald said.

The new contract also doubles the shift differential for second- and third-shift workers to \$1 an hour. Before, the 50-cent differential only applied to second-shift workers.

Also in the contract is a first-ever parental leave policy that provides four weeks of paid leave for new parents. Upon hearing about the policy, Howard-McDonald said some members in ratification meetings were in disbelief.

The bargaining committee steadfastly pursued the personal wellness days and additional vacation time they vowed to pursue when they entered contract negotiations. In the final contract, every employee will be eligible for two paid wellness days and an additional full day of vacation.

“It’s an honor to be able to go to the table and negotiate the best contract for our members, and I take great pride in the work that we were able to accomplish,” Howard-McDonald said.

The Local 55 bargaining committee included Howard-McDonald, Martha Stroger, Dorothy Smith, Irene

Lusk and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.

### Unity wins for Joliet HS transportation workers

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 197, which represents some 70 school bus drivers, bus monitors and dispatchers at the Joliet High School District 204, have won a new contract by staying strong and united through the months-long process.

Bargaining got off to a tough start when the employer refused to budge from its wage increase proposal of \$1 an hour—a figure bargaining committee member and bus driver Yolanda Alexander called “insulting.”

The local had a plan to move negotiations along. All drivers are given the opportunity to sign up for optional additional trips outside of typical school hours; the local was planning to turn down all of those optional trips for one week to remind the administration of how essential they are.

“We want them to remember we’re the first and last people the students see every day,” Alexander said. “Stop treating us like we’re nothing because we’re bus drivers. If we weren’t there, who are the teachers going to teach? What would happen without us?”

The planned job action never materialized because the administration caught wind of their plans—and at the next bargaining session, sang a different tune.

In the final contract, ratified overwhelmingly by members, wages for drivers and monitors will rise by 22% over the four-year contract. The local was also able to increase the perfect attendance bonus to \$95 per week.

The bargaining committee included Alexander, Demetrius Brown, Leona Geyer, Rebecca Norvil-Geyer and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Stephen Mittons.

### Progress for Ray Graham DSPs

BASE WAGES FOR DIRECT support professionals (DSPs) at the Ray Graham Association will increase significantly as a result of a new collective bargaining agreement ratified by the members of AFSCME Local 3492.

Part of the agreement is the full pass-through of the \$2.50 per hour wage increase that DSPs won through their lobbying efforts in the state legislature last spring. The union also won an additional 11.4% increase to base wages for DSPs and 10% for non-DSP members.

The members of Local 3492 are on a roll. At the end of 2023, they ratified an agreement that secured regionalization funds from the state in the form of a bonus.

But DSPs at Ray Graham know they need to keep pushing to build on their recent progress.

“People know there’s still more work to do,” said Emma Lane, a DSP and member of the union bargaining committee. “We have to keep the

“We want them to remember we’re the first and last people the students see every day.”

momentum going.”

“I’m hoping our members are understanding how important it is to lobby with us in Springfield,” Lane said. “This stuff works.”

The Local 3492 bargaining committee included Lane, Timothy Olaosebikan, Kevin Lane, Yma Young, Barb Hanzl, Audrey Lake, Christine Rivera, Lenora Williams, Lisa Hymon and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.



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# SHORT REPORTS

## Tragedy strikes in Rushville

A HORRIFIC TRAFFIC ACCIDENT between a school bus and a semi-truck in Rushville on March 11 resulted in the deaths of five people, including three children of members of AFSCME Local 3416 at Rushville Treatment Center.

Sarah Miller lost both of her children—Maria, age 5, and Andrew, age 3. Skyler Driscoll lost his 5-year-old son, Noah.

The eastbound bus from Schuyler-Industry Schools crossed the center line “for an unknown reason” into westbound U.S. Route 24 into the path of a semi-truck carrying sand, Illinois State Police said. Both the driver of the school bus and the semi-truck were also killed in the crash.

A psychologist from the AFSCME Corrections Connections outreach team visited the Rushville Treatment Center to provide emotional support for grieving workers in the days after the accident. Members of the local attended a community-sponsored candlelight vigil.

The City of Rushville asked all residents to fly their flags at half-staff out of reverence for the victims.

If any AFSCME member would like to contribute to the fund the local has set up for the families, checks can be made out to the Driscoll/Miller Benefit Account and mailed to: Rushville State Bank, P.O. Box 50, Rushville, IL 62681.

## AFSCME member invited to State of the Union address

GROWING UP IN GARDEN Grove, California, the son of a 17-year-old single mother, Richard “Rickk” Montoya Jr. never imagined he’d be sitting in the U.S. Capitol building during a State of the Union address.

But in March, Montoya, a Los Angeles Police Department 911 dispatcher, attended President Joe Biden’s speech as the guest of California Rep. Norma Torres, also a proud AFSCME member and a L.A. 911 emergency dispatcher before becoming a member of Congress.

Montoya serves as the secretary-treasurer of



Mourners in Rushville’s downtown square for the candlelight vigil for the children lost in the accident. Photo courtesy of Tri States Public Radio



AFSCME Local 3090 member Richard Montoya with Rep. Norma Torres before President Biden’s State of the Union address.

AFSCME Local 3090 (District Council 36).

Rep. Torres has co-sponsored a bill called the 911 SAVES Act, to change the classification of 911 operators and dispatchers from “clerical” workers to a new “Protective Service Occupation.”

“As a former 911 dispatcher, I know how important it is for dispatchers to have the training and resources they need to successfully do their work and help save lives,” Torres said. “Dispatchers are the first line of response during an emergency, and they deserve to be classified in a way that recognizes that their work is on par with that of other public servants classified as first responders.”

Crucially, says Montoya, the reclassification from a clerical worker to a first responder could ensure that positions like his are protected from budgetary winds.

Montoya points out that during times of emergencies, like natural disasters, 911

dispatchers may be called upon to work around the clock as essential personnel. Yet they are more easily laid off

during budget cuts.

“You can’t have it both ways,” says Montoya.

Of her guest, Torres said in a press release: “Union members and 911 dispatchers like Richard Montoya Jr. exemplify the working people House Democrats and the President are fighting for. I hope by inviting a current 911 dispatcher I am able to bring awareness to this important issue and my bill, the 911 Saves Act to finally give them the recognition and resources they need and deserve.”

Montoya summed up his whirlwind visit this way: “You can’t buy a ticket for this. It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. It’s an honor.”

## UCAN Academy workers form union with AFSCME

NEARLY 50 EMPLOYEES OF UCAN Academy in Chicago have officially formed their union with AFSCME Council 31.

UCAN Academy is an alternative K-12 therapeutic day school for youth from Chicago Public Schools and some surrounding suburban school districts. Between its two campuses, the new AFSCME members work as teachers, teachers’ aides, behavior intervention specialists, social workers and nurses, among others.

Workers at UCAN Academy’s parent organization are represented by AFSCME Local 3096.

In their organizing campaign, workers cited burnout, stress and safety as leading motivators for forming a union.

“People say to me, ‘I can tell how much you love your kids’, and they’re right. I love my kids enough to know they deserve me with a full gas tank,” said Olivia Borg, a teacher at UCAN Academy. “They deserve me after I ate breakfast, slept well, was able to take a break. They deserve a happy, healthy, at peace version of Ms. Borg, because in another 5 years I want to say I love my job, not I loved my job.”

“We organized because if our jobs became sustainable, we could continue to do this important work as well as improve the quality of our services.”



Workers at UCAN Academy in Chicago have voted to form their union with AFSCME.

# RETIREE NOTES

## Fighting back against Social Security cuts

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD Trump recently suggested that, if elected, his administration will make cuts to Social Security, Medicare and other federal programs that seniors rely on.

"There is a lot you can do in terms of entitlements, in terms of cutting and in terms of also the theft and the bad management of entitlements," Trump said during a recent television appearance. Even though he later backtracked on the statement, his words have caused considerable alarm among the nation's seniors.

Cuts to Social Security could be disastrous for the more than 50% of Americans 65 years and older who rely on it for more than half of their income. More than one in three Americans rely on it for 90% or more of their income.

**"Working people... pay more into Social Security than millionaires and billionaires do. It's not fair."**

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

As a candidate in 2016, Trump promised not to cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. But his actions as president were exactly the opposite. Trump's budget proposals included large cuts to Social Security, primarily by targeting disability benefits, and to Medicare, largely by reducing provider payments.

"Every few years, Americans have to again stand up against attacks to programs that are vital to our ability to live like Social Security and Medicare, and it appears that the time has again arrived," says Theresa Sheridan, president of the Dixon area Sub-chapter 72.

These threats are even more real considering the Republican efforts advancing House Resolution 5779, the

Fiscal Commission Act of 2023. This legislation would set up a fiscal commission to address the national debt and make "fast track" changes to Social Security.

It would be able to "fast-track" recommendations and accompanying legislation, bypassing the debate and amendment processes entirely, cutting seniors and advocates out of the decision-making process.

Legislation is indeed necessary to address the funding shortfall in Social Security, such as increasing the cap at which the wealthy pay into the program, but we need to fight off all efforts to cut benefits for retirees.

Fortunately, President Joe Biden's commitment to preserve Social Security and Medicare are irrefutable. In his State of the Union address, President Biden went beyond taking cuts to seniors' earned benefits off the table. He promised to "protect and strengthen Social Security and make the wealthy pay their fair share."

"Working people who built this country pay more into Social Security than millionaires and billionaires do,"

President Biden continued. "It's not fair."

AFSCME, the Alliance for Retired Americans and many senior organizations support a number of bills to secure the future of Social Security and Medicare, all of which would extend the solvency of the programs.

"As AFSCME retirees, we clearly understand that we must stand united against any further attempts to cut benefits for the working class," Sheridan said.

Retirees can never stop their vigilance against proposed cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Our voices are what have kept Social Security from being stripped away for this long; It will take our voices to ensure it remains in place for generations to come.

## Finding a long-term or rehabilitative care facility

WHETHER LOOKING FOR A skilled nursing home for rehabilitation services or a long-term placement for a loved

one, beginning the process of finding the appropriate facility can be daunting and riddled with pitfalls. But with enough research and diligence, you can find the facility that's right for your family.

The first step is to find a facility that fits your needs. The federal Nursing Home Compare website through Medicare is a great place to start. Visit it by checking [www.medicare.gov/care-compare](http://www.medicare.gov/care-compare)

Often those looking for information online for nursing home care are inundated with information from untrustworthy sources. The Medicare home page provides a place to enter a specific city or zip code to find facilities in that area or look into a specific facility.

Once a location is chosen, the specific type of care can be selected, such as rehabilitation care, nursing home services, home care or hospice. It will show ratings of facilities and contact information.


The second step is to find out which facility accepts your insurance by calling the ones you're interested in.

Step three is to check recent public health findings on the facilities you've

narrowed down and examine their records.

The IL Department of Public Health's Facility Finder will include general information about the facility, links to surveys and complaints, staffing, and levels of care provided. Doing a simple Google search for the facility finder will bring you to the page.

The fourth and final step is to pay an in-person visit to the facility. It is important to visit more than one facility so there is a chance to compare services, and there is a back-up in case the first facility of choice falls through. Develop a relationship with the admissions coordinator as they will be your main source of information.

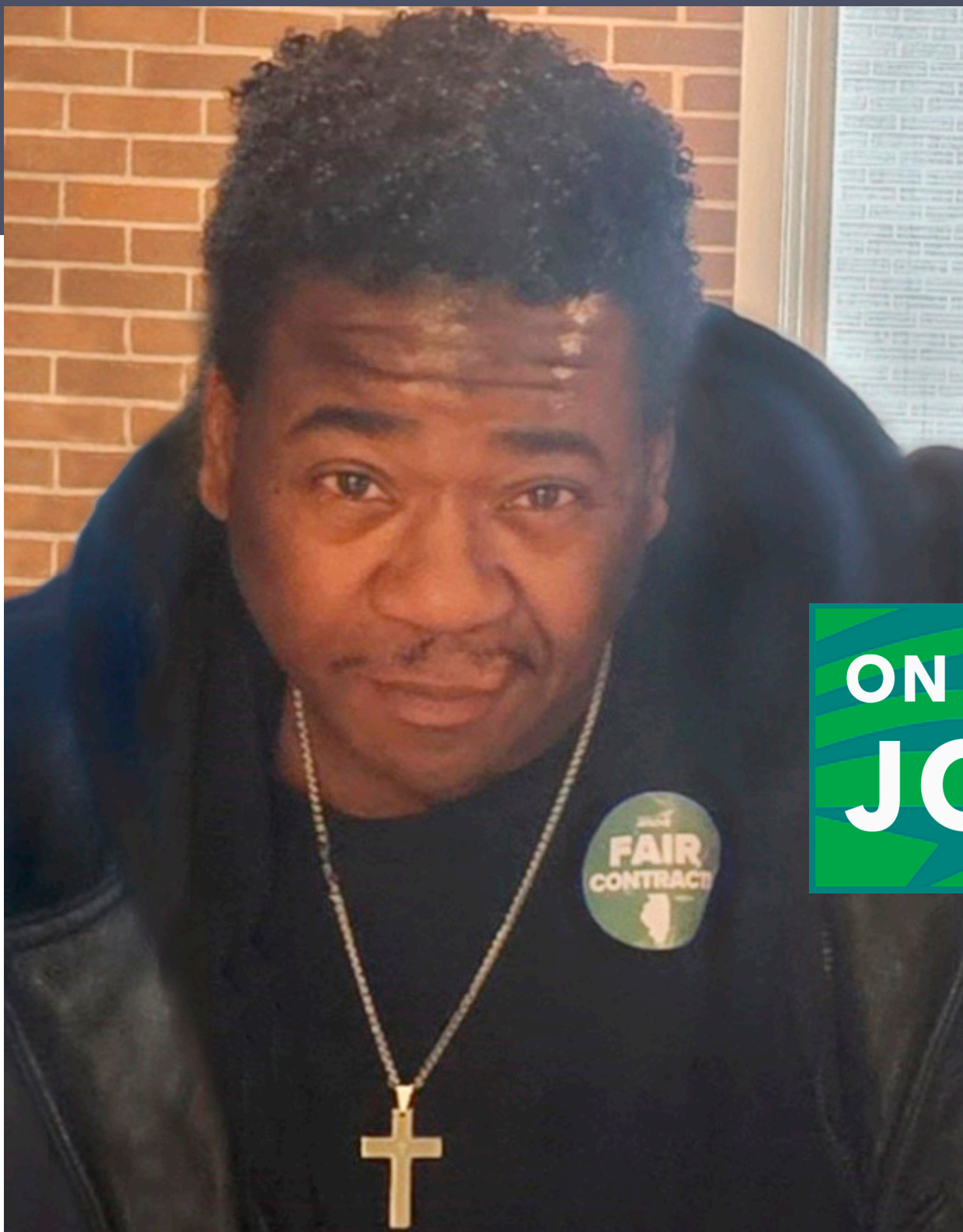
It's not easy, but with diligence and commitment, you can very likely find the right place for your family member. 

**Visit Nursing Home Compare at [www.medicare.gov/care-compare](http://www.medicare.gov/care-compare) to find a facility that fits your needs.**



## AFSCME RETIREES STAND WITH SIUE WORKERS

Chapter 31 retirees came out to support AFSCME members at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville at a critical action in February during their fight for a fair contract. From left: Pat Rensing, Council 31 staff; Catherine Bencini, Sub-chapter 93; Harriet Baker, Sub-chapter 93; Barb Brumfield, Sub-chapter 59.



## How do you make a difference in the lives of the individuals you care for?

We recently had a new individual come to Ludeman who presented some challenging behaviors. I worked with him only two times, but I saw quickly that he just wanted attention.

I started dancing with him and building a connection. I could see the smile on his face light up when I was able to make that connection with him, and it made me feel good that I gained that kind of rapport in that short of a time. I was

able to understand things about his behavior that might not have been so easy to decipher to an untrained eye. When I saw I could get him to smile, that was a great feeling.

To this day, there are people from the past who have moved on and gotten their own apartments, and they still come back to visit and say hi to all the people who work here. They miss us when they're gone.


## Why did you get involved with your local union?

I have a motto: "Everybody matters or nobody matters." The union has given me the vehicle to uphold that way of thinking and put it into practice. It allows me to show people that they matter and to show that not everybody is going to sit by while injustice happens.

## How do you build solidarity in your union?

It starts with new employee orientations. I'm the New Membership Chair of our local, and we always make sure to talk to people about the benefits that they have—and tell them those benefits didn't come from management. The union fought for those benefits and I tell people not to take it for granted. To see the people who came before you who gave their blood, sweat and tears to get you the longevity you can have if you do right. You can buy a house on our pay.

I was on the contract negotiations team, I would talk to other employees about the difference in the pay scale and tiers that came about from these negotiations, and that's all because of the union. No one gave you that. If you have problems, the union has lawyers that will fight for you if it goes to arbitration.

The union is a voice. The union is a shoulder to lean on. The union has a heart for its members. 

# Mark Brackett

MENTAL HEALTH TECHNICIAN II  
LUDEMAN DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER

AFSCME Local 2645

## How did you start working with people with disabilities?

I had an aunt and uncle that were helpful to everybody in the neighborhood. They ran a day care program so when I was growing up, that's what I was around. I would help take care of the kids. I was raised by older people who talked a lot about integrity. They would talk about character. "If you don't help other people what does that say about you?" was a sentiment that was drilled into me from a young age. I wanted a job where I could help people.

It was also ingrained in me from a young age that a job with the state is a good job. When it came time for me to find a career, my sister told me I should be looking for a job that has stability, and a job with the state offers that. The pay, longevity and security are all very appealing, and, of course, the union was going to make sure you wouldn't get walked all over by management.

## What does your average day at work look like?

Every day is different, and every day is busy. The first thing is the shift report with the staff that's about to leave to check in and get everybody on the same page. Then it's time to start helping the individuals with their breakfast, checking their diet and making sure their hygiene is done. There's a lot of upkeep throughout the day, like washing their clothes, changing their sheets, mopping the floor, going underneath their bed and sweeping up the dust bunnies.

There's lots of appointments to go to and birthday parties to set up, too. In between, we're always running training programs and doing assessments on the individuals.

We all try to go above and beyond because we care about the individuals and like to see the difference it makes in their lives.