

ON THE MOVE



**Unity, strike readiness
in Champaign County leads
to contract win**

PAGE 7

**IDNR EMPLOYEES MAKE
RECORD YEAR HAPPEN** PAGE 3

**1,200 WORKERS JOIN
AFSCME** PAGE 6

**FEDERAL BUDGET SPELLS
TROUBLE** PAGES 8 & 9

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

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



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE ARE A FIGHTING UNION.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Our strength is in our solidarity

When the members of AFSCME Local 900 who work for Champaign County voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike in May, it was not an empty gesture. They knew the pressures they would face, the sacrifices they would have to make.

They also knew beyond any doubt that they deserved much better than the meager terms the county had held to over many months at the bargaining table.

As the strike date approached, the unity and determination of Local 900 members did not falter. No doubt they were buoyed by members of other locals from throughout the state who travelled to Champaign to rally with them or sent offers of assistance. And, in turn, that network of AFSCME members across Illinois was inspired by the courage and determination of the Local 900 members.

In the end, a tentative agreement was reached on the night before the strike was set to begin—an agreement that represented genuine progress for the entire bargaining unit and that was resoundingly ratified in a matter of days.

There is much that we can learn from this battle in America's heartland. We're in a time when our country's leaders are seeking to sow division and animosity—and to shift wealth from working people who are struggling to get by to the billionaires who already have more money than they can ever possibly spend.

Perhaps the most valuable of those lessons is the importance of solidarity—of standing together, of sticking up for each other, of refusing to back down in the face of threats—whether it be from a band of local politicians or the national politicians leading an assault on the progress we've fought so hard for over so many decades.

I found that spirit of solidarity powerfully represented

in the speech that Kim Pope, president of AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University, made when she came to speak at a rally in support of the Champaign County employees as they prepared to strike. I wanted to share her words with all of you at this critical time.



KIM POPE

Our locals might be different when it comes to the workplace and what we do. Some of us are at universities, state and local government offices, direct care facilities, corrections facilities, museums, libraries, and much more. But when it comes to contract negotiations, we have all experienced the same frustrations, the same obstacles, and we've heard the same tired excuses.

"We just don't have the money."

"There's just not room in the budget this year."

"We appreciate you, but our hands are tied."

We all know the truth though, right? They have the money, they just don't want to spend it on you. And if they truly "appreciated you," then they would prove it by giving you a fair contract right now.


Let's be clear. What's happening here in Champaign County is management's failure. Their failure to lead effectively and plan responsibly is

not the fault of the workers, and it certainly is not an excuse to put their livelihood on the line. At EIU, we know how it feels to be treated like a number on a spreadsheet. And when you're constantly fed those pitiful excuses, how can you not feel that way? But we are not numbers—we're people with families to support and bills to pay. We are parents, caregivers, neighbors, community members. We are human beings, and we deserve to be treated with respect, and not like line items on a budget.

The AFSCME workers of Champaign County do work that is crucial to the functioning and safety of this community. They show up everyday, doing the real work to keep the many areas of this county running smoothly. And for the board to push them to the brink of a strike is not just shameful and disrespectful—it's downright dangerous. It puts this entire community at risk. And I hope the community understands that you're not asking for anything unreasonable. You're asking for basic fairness: liveable wages, affordable and decent health care, and for dignity and respect on the job.

Last week, I was in town for a council meeting and our Executive Director, Roberta Lynch, said something that stuck with me. She said, "We are a fighting union. And we do not back down from a fight." My brothers, sisters, and siblings of Champaign County, I want you to remember that. When you're reporting to work and you're at the bargaining table, and you're frustrated, and you're tired, and you're hearing those weak excuses. Remember that we are a fighting union. Remember that we do not back down. Remember that you are not in this alone.

Because we are your AFSCME family.

And we stand with you. We believe in you. We are in this fight with you, and when we fight, we win! 



ON THE MOVE

Illinois *On the Move* is published four 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 Avenue, 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director
Ben Conboy, Editor
Julie Wildman, Designer

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

Executive Director
Roberta Lynch

Deputy Director
Mike Newman

State Sector Executive Vice-President
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

University Sector Executive Vice-President
Charles Carver, Local 1110

Private Sector Executive Vice-President
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237

Local Government Executive Vice-President
John Rayburn, Local 1215

Secretary
Loretta Soresie, Local 2615

Treasurer
Terrence Boone, Local 672

BOARD MEMBERS

State Conference Board Co-Chairs
Arnold Black, Local 2971
Danny Williams, Local 29
Tim Worker, Local 993

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS
Martha Bernice Stroger, Local 55
D. Safiya Felters, Local 2854
Susanne Littlefield, Local 2912
Kobie Robinson, Local 3835

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS
Ruben Delgado, Local 1514
Timothy Olaosebikan, Local 3492
Tom Opolony, Local 89
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693
James Stickle, Local 1274
Alice Sutherland, Local 448

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS
Craig Linne, Local 2073
Jack Matthews, Local 1964
Nicholas McLaughlin, Local 2856
Kimberly Pope, Local 981

REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS
Jerry Grammer, Local 1175
Keith Kracht, Local 203
Julie LaTempt-Brazier, Local 2887
John Medley, Local 1805

TRUSTEES
Bonnie Brimm, Local 3280
William Lee, Local 494
Ona Rivero Winfield, Local 141

RETIREE CHAPTER 31 PRESIDENT
Larry Brown

IDNR employees make record year possible

State workers' dedication key to attracting 41 million visitors to Illinois parks and historic sites

Illinois' state parks and historic sites welcomed more than 41 million visitors in 2024, marking the highest attendance in nearly 15 years—a milestone that wouldn't have been possible without the hard work and dedication of union members throughout the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

From the World Shooting Complex in Sparta to the hiking trails of Starved Rock State Park near Rockford, IDNR employees are on the front lines ensuring visitors have safe, clean, and memorable experiences at Illinois' natural areas.

Maintaining world-class facilities

Rick Rice, a member of AFSCME Local 1805 who works at the World Shooting Complex in Sparta, has witnessed firsthand how proper maintenance and care can transform a state facility into a national destination.

"We have 1,000 campsites, and when the grand shooting event comes in August, every one of those is filled," Rice said. "There's people that still have to go outside of town and rent hotels in St. Louis. Every campsite is filled up."

Rice and his colleagues handle everything from electrical problems and water

leaks to grounds maintenance and facility upkeep. Their work ensures that major events like Amateur Trap Shooting Association competitions can accommodate the massive influx of visitors who create a boon for the local economy.

Hands-on conservation

A Site Tech II and steward for AFSCME Local 2794, Nick Rodriguez is one of a new generation of conservation



AFSCME Local 2794 members (from left) Nick Rodriguez, Brian Alling and Dave Shumway.



Lincoln's New Salem was Illinois' most visited historic site in 2024.

workers who combine environmental stewardship with public service. Rodriguez and his co-workers oversee multiple locations in north-central Illinois, including Illini State Park, LaSalle Lake Fish and Wildlife Area, and Marseilles Fish and Wildlife Area.

"We have a lot of responsibility for the amount of acreage we cover," Rodriguez said. "Usually start of the day is making rounds, cleaning restrooms, [and] checking camper permits."

A typical day in the busy summer months can bring anything, and Rodriguez and his co-workers have to be ready for whatever comes their way.

"If you have a tree that falls, [it] needs to be cut up; there could be anything mechanical, heavy equipment. It varies day to day."

The work extends beyond basic maintenance to active

conservation efforts. Rodriguez and his team tackle invasive species removal, which allows visitors to see deeper into forests and spot more wildlife.

"When people come up to us and say it's looking great and thank us for what we do, that's an amazing feeling," Rodriguez said.

Record numbers reflect quality work

Nine Illinois state parks attracted more than 1 million visitors each in 2024, led by Starved Rock with 2.4 million visitors and Illinois Beach (along Lake Michigan north of Chicago) with 2 million.

Rodriguez has noticed the surge.

"Even days during the week are busier than the weekends used to be," he said, "whether it's people just coming down to fish or people that want to spend time outside."

The busiest historic sites also benefited from AFSCME members' care, with Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site—where the former president lived from 1831 to 1837—welcoming nearly 360,000 visitors and Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site attracting more than 200,000.

No matter where they work, spending every day in the great outdoors is a boon for IDNR employees.

"People enjoy their work and love coming to work every day," Rodriguez said. "I truly feel blessed. It was not easy to get one of these jobs, and I feel blessed to have it and to put forth my best effort because of that."



IDNR employees care for more than 100 state-protected natural areas like the LaSalle Lake Fish and Wildlife Area, pictured here.

Carrying on the fight to fix Tier 2 pensions

The spring legislative session ended on May 31 with a big disappointment: The legislature did not take any action on proposals to reform and improve Tier 2, the pension plan for Illinois public employees hired since 2011.

For more than a year now, the We Are One Illinois union coalition—of which AFSCME Council 31 is a leading member—has waged a nonstop, vigorous grassroots campaign to educate lawmakers about the urgent need to address the injustice of the two-tiered pension system.

Over the course of the spring legislative session, the coalition responded to the concerns of the governor’s office and legislative leaders and participated in dozens of hearings, working groups and direct negotiations.

But there was no way to adequately prepare for the sea change in Washington, D.C. that produced a federal budget

with massive cuts to state and local government funding. Although the budget bill hadn’t yet passed Congress, Illinois legislators foresaw the likelihood of dire consequences for Illinois residents and severe pressures on the Illinois state budget.

“Our fight to get the pension improvement bill across finish line was a casualty of those expected cuts in federal funding,” Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits Martha Merrill said. “Legislators became deeply uneasy about any measures that involved potential new costs to the state.”

Meanwhile, the Tier 2 crisis continues to grow. Every



It’s crucial that lawmakers know public employees won’t let up when it comes to Tier 2 improvements.

day, public employees are leaving their professions and our state because they can’t count on a secure retirement. The longer the state delays fixing this problem, the more damaging and costly it becomes.

The We Are One Illinois

coalition is making sure that this issue remains front and center for state lawmakers.

“The fight to fix Tier 2 must go on,” Merrill said, “and the role of every AFSCME member remains vitally important.”

The coalition has begun in-depth meetings with key legislators to explain the coalition’s plan and address their fiscal concerns. AFSCME members should be on standby for further rounds of legislative calls and emails. ➤

IDOC local president issues urgent call for stepped-up safety

Assaults on staff have been on the rise in the Illinois Department of Corrections for years. Too often, staff have been punched, grabbed, scratched, spit on and had bodily fluids thrown at them.

At the Council and local levels, our union has been fighting for change. But the leadership of the Department of Corrections tends to turn a blind eye to these problems. Workers feel that the department’s attitude is: “This is the job you signed up for.”

But that’s not true. Yes, a job in a prison carries greater risk than most. But no one should have to fear being assaulted every day when they walk into work. And no one should feel like their employer doesn’t

care about their safety. Yet that’s exactly how many IDOC employees feel.

Tenielle Fitzjarrald, the president of AFSCME Local 3600 at Lawrence Correctional Center, is speaking out about a recent assault on Sgt. Jonovan Bridwell in order to call out IDOC’s lack of concern for employee safety.

Her message (at right) is clear: IDOC urgently needs leadership that cares about the safety and well-being of its employees. The time is now! ➤



I want to talk to you about Sergeant Bridwell. He has given more than a decade of his life to this Department, since 2011. In less than one year, he has been assaulted multiple times at our facility. He’s endured a chipped tooth, a scar on his forehead due to requiring stitches after being assaulted, an ER visit after being exposed to drugs inmates are smoking in our housing units, and just this past Friday, he was viciously headbutted and taken to the ground by an inmate. His wrist and hand were injured when they became tangled in the restraints during the attack.

Now, he’s off work for an undetermined amount of time, trying to heal physically and mentally from something that should never be an accepted “risk of the job.”

What do we say to him? What do we say to his family? What do we say to the other staff who look at his injuries and wonder if they’re next?

This is not just about Sergeant Bridwell. His story is one of many stories that should enrage anyone who cares about the safety and wellbeing of the people who keep these facilities running. It is infuriating to watch IDOC do next to nothing to stop this violence; to see them fail again and again to send the message that our safety matters and that assaulting an officer, a sergeant, a counselor, or any employee will not be tolerated.

We know that what happens to one of us happens to all of us. These assaults don’t just leave physical wounds, they erode morale, trust, and our mental health. It gets harder every day to reassure our people that anyone in leadership cares when we see the same cycle over and over again: paperwork, excuses, blame-shifting, and no real deterrence for the next attack.

In Solidarity,

Tenielle Fitzjarrald
President
AFSCME Local 3600

New agreement clamps down on offender drug use in IDOC facilities

For years, AFSCME members have been sounding the alarm about the threat that increased offender drug abuse in state prisons poses to staff and individuals in custody.

Staff exposure to drug fumes has become alarmingly common. AFSCME members who work in IDOC facilities say the smoke and fumes can be overpowering, and the number of staff exposed is almost too large to count.

Union members report that the primary means by which drugs are smuggled into prisons is through the mail. So AFSCME set out to tackle that problem directly.

In May, Council 31 and the department signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that required the department to

implement a digital mail-scanning system by July 1. Under the new system, offenders will each have their own tablets. Most mail won't even enter an IDOC facility; instead, it will be processed and scanned by a vendor and sent digitally to those tablets for viewing.

Some drug smugglers have exploited a loophole around legal mail to get past any examination of the parcel's contents, but the new MOU puts stricter security rules in place around the use and dissemination of legal mail to make sure that loophole no longer exists.

AFSCME members who work in IDOC are hopeful that these measures will go a long way towards making prisons safer for all.



Rick Hepp
Menard Correctional Center
AFSCME Local 1175
“The worst fear a lot of our staff have is inadvertently bringing drug residue home to their loved ones or little kids. They fear they could come home with this stuff on their body and they don't even know it. You could walk in your front door and your kid jumps in your arms and you just exposed him. That's the fear.”

“The mail-scanning is absolutely going to make a dent. I will be shocked if we don't see a huge drop in exposures. It can't come soon enough.”



Jeremy Hendrix
Robinson Correctional Center
AFSCME Local 3649
“We've had well over 25 exposures now. We even have inmates coming up to us saying, 'We want this stuff out of here.' It's in every housing unit. Just about three weeks ago we had a sergeant doing cell shakedowns who went into a seizure and quit breathing from the exposure.”

“There's smoke everywhere. We're fed up. We're all ready for the drugs to be out of the facility.”



Eric McCubbin
Dixon Correctional Center
AFSCME Local 817
“We've had a lot of exposures. Even after an employee gets exposed, they are required to keep coming back to that same area. They experience that trauma all over again. It's almost like PTSD.”

“Our staff want to come in, do their job and know they're coming home safe to their families at the end of the day. I'm hopeful that mail-scanning will make Dixon a better place to work.”



Tenielle Fitzjarrald
Lawrence Correctional Center
AFSCME Local 3600
“Exposures are commonplace.

The department just acts like it's part of our day-to-day jobs.

“We know the drugs are being brought into the institution primarily through the mail. The amount of unknown substances coming into our institution is astounding.

“With mail-scanning, I am certain that our staff will be safer inside the walls.”



Eric Huber
Graham Correctional Center
AFSCME Local 2856
“I was the first person to get exposed at

Graham. They had to hit me with Narcan twice and I had to spend the night in the hospital. It hasn't gotten any better since then.

“This is a great thing that the union was able to accomplish. It's going to be a big help and a big relief to get the drugs out of the mail.”



Nick McLaughlin
AFSCME Local 2856
Graham Correctional Center
“Almost every night on the 3-11

shift, there's a medical emergency from someone who's intoxicated.

“I'm very optimistic about mail-scanning. It was a long time coming. I think we're going to see a drastic decrease in exposures. Once we get the drugs out, it will make Graham a much safer place to work.”

College of DuPage employees form union with AFSCME

Taking the next step in their union organizing campaign that kicked off in March, some 600 employees of the College of DuPage (COD) on July 8 filed a majority interest petition with the Illinois Labor Relations Board.

Upon verifying that the petition includes the signatures of a majority of employees, the board will officially certify the union as part of AFSCME Council 31.


The new union—College of DuPage Staff United/AFSCME—will represent “classified” staff (including administrative, clerical, IT and similar employees) whose work supports COD students and faculty. About 50 College of DuPage custodial workers are already represented by AFSCME.

In the public letter that announced their organizing campaign in March, COD employees wrote, “We are forming our union because we are proud of the work we do to see our students and community

thrive. ...[I]t’s time for staff to have our own voice.” College of DuPage is one of the top community colleges in

Illinois. Between its six satellite locations and online courses, it serves more than 20,000 students from DuPage, Cook and Will Counties each year. Employees have been frustrated by management’s erosion of their benefits. What tipped many over the edge was the college’s use of a compensation study to justify freezing the wages of many staff. Kim Still has worked for COD for 30 years. For the last

12, she’s worked in veterans services, processing education benefits that veterans can use to attend the college. She said she and her coworkers are proud of the work they do, but that work needs to be properly valued. “I love everything about what College of DuPage represents,” Still said. “I love what we do for the students. I love how we impact their lives. Every one of us has their hand in the

students’ success here in one way or another. We’re a common good for our community and we deserve to be treated as such.” Still said she’s tired of feeling like she and her coworkers don’t have a say in how COD operates and treats its employees. “We deserve better benefits. We deserve better wages. And we deserve to be heard,” Still said. 



College of DuPage employees formed their union with AFSCME so they can have a stronger voice on the job and advocate for better benefits.

Lake County Health Department employees join AFSCME

They help keep Lake County’s 700,000 residents healthy and safe, and now some 600 employees of the Lake County Health Department have formed their union with AFSCME Council 31 so they can achieve safety and security for themselves.

The workers filed their union petition with the Illinois Labor Relations Board on June 4. County health department workers say they’re motivated to come together in their union to win better pay, reduce turnover, improve transparency and accountability from upper management, and seek greater job security in a time of uncertainty and threatened federal funding cuts. “As LCHD employees, we deserve to have a voice. Joining AFSCME allows us to have the much-needed


input we deserve,” said Erika Lavin, a group home counselor II and a member of the union organizing committee. “Organizing as a union affords us an opportunity to advocate for better wages, work conditions and benefits. This in turn will ultimately improve the quality of services we deliver.” Karen Singer is a community health worker who connects people with resources and medical care. Every time she can help someone, she gets a rush of gratification. “We all love our jobs,” Singer said. “It’s a very



Some 600 employees of the Lake County Health Department formed their union with AFSCME to fight for the benefits that other AFSCME-represented health departments have won.

powerful feeling to be able to help people in the way that we do.” But Health Department employees have fallen behind compared to the pay and benefits of other union-represented health

departments in the area. “We want to make sure that we are valued,” Singer said, “because every day when we come to work, we do our very best. And that deserves something in return.”

Health Department employees are just the latest Lake County employees to form their union with AFSCME. Council 31 already represents employees of the Lake County chief judge, circuit clerk and coroner. 

Unity and strike readiness key to Local 900’s contract win

In their efforts to secure a fair contract, members of AFSCME Local 900 walked right up to the brink of their first-ever strike.

The Champaign County employees didn’t want to walk off the job, but after more than six months at the bargaining table, they were ready to do so. In a vote held in May, 90% of eligible employees voted, and 96% of votes cast were Yes to authorize a strike if necessary.

When management kept dragging its feet in negotiations, Local 900’s bargaining committee set a deadline. If they didn’t have an agreement by the morning of July 8, union members would walk off the job.

Wages were at the center of their demands. Starting wages at the county have remained stagnant at \$16 an hour—barely above the legal minimum. One-third of the bargaining unit made less than \$20 an hour.

For workers who make the courthouse run, administer county services, repair and maintain highways, find and care for stray animals and support the operations of the county jail, those wages were a slap in the face. And management was offering little more across the table.

In addition, the county was refusing to ensure that workers’

out-of-pocket health care costs wouldn’t skyrocket by as much as 150%.

Management was even balking at paying for rabies vaccines for animal control employees who are exposed to the disease in the course of their work.

Management’s hard line unified the local.

“We were all feeling angry,” Local 900 President CeCe Phillips said. “We all stood together and said, ‘We aren’t going to take this.’ The way it united our local was amazing.”

Council 31 reached out to other AFSCME locals in central Illinois to urge support in the event of a strike and the response was swift and strong. Local 900 was flooded with messages from members of other locals who were ready to donate food and supplies and to come out in solidarity should a strike happen.

“I couldn’t believe the amount of support we got. It really touched me,” said Bobbie Johnson, a member of the bargaining committee. “It brought out the best in everyone.”



Members of AFSCME Local 900 announce that an overwhelming majority of members voted to authorize a strike in May.

The day before the strike was set to begin, the union bargaining committee went back to the table for one last attempt to secure a fair contract without striking.

And they got it done! After an eight-hour bargaining session and just 12 hours before they were set to walk off the job, the bargaining committee reached a tentative agreement with the county.

After all the months of battling, real gains were made. The local won across-the-board

pay raises, with bigger increases for the lowest-wage employees. They succeeded in keeping their health care affordable, reducing premiums and maintaining out-of-pocket maximums. Plus, they won the employer-paid rabies vaccines for animal control employees that had come to symbolize the solidarity that carried them all forward.

In the ensuing days, the agreement was overwhelmingly ratified by the membership.

“This just proves what can be accomplished when we are

united and stand up for what we deserve,” Phillips said.

The Local 900 bargaining committee included Phillips, Johnson, Jarod Tinsley, Justin Matthew, Oscar Alvarado, Brianna Harrison, Riley Lannom, Rosemary Ferrara, Leslie Erdman, Emmett Elward, Melissa Jamison, Janae Wisheart, Chuck Chaney, Cody Berry, Alan Miller, Nic King and Heidi Kemper.

The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel.

Thrive of Lake County workers vote overwhelmingly to authorize ULP Strike

After nearly a year of urging Thrive of Lake County management to honor the union contract agreed to last August, the nursing home employees, members of AFSCME Local 2452, voted by an overwhelming margin to authorize an unfair labor practice strike.

The wealthy corporate owners of Thrive’s parent company, Ignite Medical Resorts, have yet to sign the union contract that their facility managers agreed to nearly a year ago.

Ignite is refusing to sign the contract because of the mandatory staffing ratios the union fought to include. Better staffing helps retain experienced caregivers, reduce turnover, improve consistency

in care, and build stronger relationships between staff and residents.

But instead of respecting the agreement Thrive made, Ignite is trying to invalidate these critical standards, essentially choosing profits over people.

Thrive’s frontline caregivers don’t want to strike. They show up every day to care for the residents who depend on them. But corporate

management’s refusal to honor the contract facility management agreed to is leaving them little choice.

“When we negotiated our contract, we fought for better staffing because we know what that means for our residents,” said Nicole Thomas, a certified nursing assistant and president of Local 2452. “It means quicker response times when residents call for help and better quality of life for the people we care for.”

AFSCME Local 2452 represents 115 employees of the nursing home. They are nurses, housekeepers, cooks, servers, and more.

“We are the heart and soul of this facility,” said Maribel Novelo, a longtime certified nursing assistant and union member. “We’ve done



Members of AFSCME Local 2452 are speaking out for safe staffing.

everything we can to resolve this without a strike. But when management won’t honor its word, when they put corporate profits ahead of the people who provide quality care, we have to stand up for what’s right.”

No official strike date has been announced, but Local 2452 members remain hopeful that management will finally do the right thing by honoring the contract, respecting the caregivers, and putting resident care first.

THE BIG, BAD FEDERAL BUDGET SPELLS BIG TROUBLE FOR ILLINOIS

Make no mistake: the very ugly budget bill that was rammed through Congress is one of the most destructive pieces of legislation of our time. In order to pay for trillions of dollars in tax breaks for the richest Americans, the law makes deep, painful cuts to crucial programs on which millions of working people depend.

With those cuts will come catastrophic losses in funding to Illinois—along with the potential for tens of thousands of job losses, hospital and nursing home closures, higher education cuts, and more.

\$48 billion

in Medicaid funding the state
will lose over the next 10 years

Top 1%

of the richest
Americans to get
more tax breaks
than the bottom
60% combined

9

rural hospitals at
risk of closing

90

nursing homes at risk of closing

50,000

jobs lost in Illinois due to
Medicaid and SNAP cuts over
the next 10 years

New limits

on student loan
borrowing will
reduce access to
higher education
and exacerbate
enrollment challenges

\$705 million

in SNAP funding
the state must
make up

BUDGET MYTHS VS. FACTS

Myth: This budget ends taxes on overtime.

Fact: The law does not end taxes on overtime, but instead temporarily allows for a deduction of up to \$12,500 (for single filers) overtime paid. The deduction only pertains to the additional overtime percentage, i.e. the one-half of the time-and-a-half overtime rate. So, if your overtime earned is \$3,000, only \$1,000 would be tax-exempt; the first \$2,000 would still be taxed. The law’s writers made sure this provision was temporary, and it will end after 2028. So it’s little more than a ploy to help the bill’s supporters make it through the 2028 elections.

Myth: This budget eliminates taxes on Social Security.

Fact: The bill does not eliminate taxes on Social Security. Instead, it creates a new temporary “senior” deduction that will slightly shrink the portion of benefits subject to federal taxation. Like the overtime deduction, this deduction is temporary and ends after 2028.

Myth: President Trump says the budget doesn’t cut Medicaid for people who rely on it.

Fact: The bill cuts \$1.02 trillion in Medicaid funding over the next 10 years. The bill adds stricter work requirements for Medicaid recipients, but many already work and some are unable to work, so there’s not going to be big savings there. The bulk of the federal funding lost just shifts the burden for funding health care to the states.

Myth: My job has nothing to do with Medicaid, so these massive cuts don’t affect me.

Fact: The state of Illinois will see a decline of \$48 billion in federal Medicaid funding over the next 10 years. The state still has a responsibility to fund its own Medicaid program with or without federal funding, which means it could be forced to make significant cuts in other areas—especially other areas of state government—to make up the shortfall.

AMERICA’S UNIONS ARE UNITED: THIS BUDGET IS A JOB-KILLING HANDOUT TO BILLIONAIRES



AFSCME: To satisfy the greed of their mega-donors, anti-worker elected officials voted to rob working families of their health care and life-sustaining public services to hand over trillions in tax cuts to the richest people on earth. Because of this bill, children will go hungry. Seniors will lose access to long-term care. People will die from preventable causes, and hundreds of thousands of workers will lose their jobs.



AFL-CIO: This bill will rip health care from 17 million workers to pay for massive tax giveaways to the wealthy and big corporations, amounting to the country’s largest money grab from the working class to the ultra-rich. Every member of Congress who voted for this devastating bill picked the pockets of working people to hand billionaires a \$5 trillion gift.



International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers: Make no mistake, this bill will cost hundreds of thousands of good-paying construction jobs, billions of work hours, and hundreds of billions in lost wages and economic benefits to America’s middle class.



National Education Association: Instead of investing in our children’s education, as well as their health and their future, this law hands billions in tax breaks to the ultrawealthy—while pulling the rug out from under America’s students and families.



Laborers International Union: This vote is a betrayal of American workers. While politicians celebrate narrow provisions on minor overtime adjustments, they’ve gutted entire energy projects and the livelihoods that came with them. No tweak to overtime taxation can justify killing thousands of jobs.

Win on rights for university employees, but funding falls short

When state lawmakers packed up and headed home from Springfield on June 1, they left behind some big questions about the future of Illinois' public universities—and the workers who keep them running.

The good news is that AFSCME scored a major victory that will make it easier for university workers to fight for better working conditions. The not-so-good news is that universities are still getting short-changed on funding, which means continued pressure on staffing and services.

AFSCME improves bargaining law

The biggest win for state university employees came with the passage of House Bill 3046, which closes a loophole that universities have been using to dodge tough conversations at the bargaining table.

Sometimes, when union members tried to negotiate about critical issues like filling vacant positions, universities

would claim their hands were tied by civil service laws. Management would essentially point to these regulations as an excuse to shut down bargaining over certain subjects.

AFSCME Local 2887, which represents employees at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, ran into this problem during their recent negotiations for a new contract. Management insisted that it couldn't agree to the local's proposed vacation accrual schedule because the State University Civil Service System outlined a different, more problematic schedule.

"We spent six months arguing with management at the bargaining table, saying they were allowed to give us better vacation than what was outlined in civil service," said

Amy Bodenstab, president of AFSCME Local 2887. "That was time wasted that we could have spent making progress on other issues."

HB 3046 makes that excuse a lot harder to use. It says that universities can agree to contract terms that give workers stronger rights and protections than what's already in civil service law. The bill sailed through both chambers, passing the House by an overwhelming majority on April 8 and the Senate unanimously on May 22.

"This law makes our lives easier at the bargaining table and prevents management from trying to take away our rights and benefits by hiding behind civil service rules," Bodenstab said. "The next time we go to the bargaining table, we have this law to lean on."

Once Gov. Pritzker signs it, university administrators won't be able to hide behind civil service rules when workers want to negotiate over staffing levels, vacancy policies, and other workplace issues that are normally covered by civil service rules.

Funding falls short

While AFSCME won the battle over bargaining rights, the state legislature ultimately failed to pass a budget that includes an adequate increase in funding for universities.

Gov. Pritzker had proposed a 3% funding increase for public universities in his FY 26 budget plan—not a huge amount, but a step in the right direction for institutions that have been struggling with years of inadequate state support.

Lawmakers chose not to support the governor's plan and instead passed a budget that only includes a guaranteed 1% increase. They also set aside money for an additional 2% boost, but universities can only get those funds if the governor decides to release them.

That puts university workers in a tough spot. Most universities will probably plan their budgets around the 1% they know they're getting, rather than the 3% they might get if the governor releases it.


This funding uncertainty

is more than just a numbers game for workers. It affects everything from staffing levels to equipment maintenance to student services. And as an Illinois Economic Policy Institute study found in 2023, university workers are already earning 14 to 21% less than state employees doing similar work. That's unfair.

"Funding for state universities has continued to go down, and we took a big hit during Rauner's budget crisis," said Local 981 President Kim Pope. "That needs to change."

Pope said more equitable state funding is about more than being able to pay workers what they deserve—it's about investing in students and Illinois' overall economic well-being.

"The state needs to start investing in higher education," Pope said. "We need to make sure students have the resources they need and that workers can pay their bills."

"It was disappointing to see the state fell short, but I know our union will continue this fight." 



University employees have waged strong contract fights to secure better pay and benefits, but legislative fixes are required to bring true pay parity to state universities.

Meet 2025’s Marquardt Scholarship winners

Each year, AFSCME Council 31 awards college scholarships to three AFSCME members or their children based on school grades, family need, and a written essay.

The \$2,000 scholarships honor Larry Marquardt, the first executive director of Council 31 and a tireless union organizer who dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people.

Each applicant is asked to write an essay on why the labor movement is relevant and needed more than ever today. Their moving essays illustrate how their parents’ unions have changed their lives and inculcated in them a deep respect for the labor movement.

You’ll find an excerpt from each winner’s essay at right.



Ashley Bock
Daughter of Steven Bock, AFSCME Local 1019, Springfield state conglomerate
Attending University of Illinois at Springfield this fall

“The labor movement has always been about people and workers who wake up early, put in long hours, and still struggle to make ends meet. It’s about a single parent working two jobs, the factory worker fighting for safer conditions, and the health care worker demanding fair wages. The labor movement isn’t just relevant. It’s essential because it stands up for people who might otherwise be ignored.

“Nowadays, many workers are dealing with stagnant wages, shaky job security and unsafe work environments. Big corporations continue to prioritize profits over people, making the labor movement just as critical now as it ever was. Organizing, collective bargaining and advocacy give workers the power to demand fair wages, better benefits and respect in the workplace.”



Gavin Gilbert
Son of Jennifer Gilbert, AFSCME Local 448, Rockford state conglomerate
Attending University of Iowa this fall

“As an 18-year-old preparing for college and to one day enter the workforce, there is much I do not know about what it means to work for a living or what challenges people face trying to provide for themselves and their families. What I do know is that, as a child raised by two parents who are both proud union members, those unions made sure that my parents were able to go to work safely, earn a living wage, have affordable healthcare and have the time off needed to be present for me.

“I am comforted by the fact that my chosen career path is one that is unionized. As a future music teacher, I plan not only to be a member of our union but to get involved and make sure that unions remain the backbone of the American worker.”



Gabriela Bryan
Daughter of Kristan Pica, AFSCME Local 1274, Hill Correctional Center
Attending Culver-Stockton College this fall

“My mom’s annual increase in pay due to the union bargaining on her behalf provides us a stable and above-average income. The union provides precautions that address unsafe working conditions to make my mom’s workplace safe. My mom, while working as a female in an all-male prison, knows there are many obstacles that can be dangerous. But I feel confident that the union is fighting to address any unsafe working conditions. I am always thankful when my mom comes home safe every day.”



Family Scholarship winner: “AFSCME has allowed my family to grow closer”

Each year, AFSCME International awards 10 Family Scholarships to children of AFSCME members throughout the nation.

One of this year’s winners is Sophia Dailey, the daughter of Catherine Dailey of AFSCME Local 1964 in Springfield.

Part of the scholarship process includes writing an essay about what AFSCME has meant to their family. Below is an excerpt of Sophia’s winning essay.

“AFSCME HAS ALLOWED MY family a life today that would be unimaginable without their assistance. Before my mom got a job at the Illinois State

Police, she had just become a single mom. She worked four jobs and had four kids to care for at home. My mom was rarely home and it felt like she always had to rush to another job whenever she was home.

“Our whole lives changed when my mom accepted a job with the Illinois State Police in 2016. Because of AFSCME’s continual fight for fair wages, my mom did not need to work four jobs anymore, and she did not need to work as many hours.

“We all noticed that when she came home, she was not as worn out as she was before, and I could see the gratitude that beamed throughout her body. Because of AFSCME’s fight for a safe workplace, my mom doesn’t have to worry about being abused or hurt at work. AFSCME allows my mom to receive raises, sick days and vacation time. Her other jobs never had these benefits.

“Her job at the Illinois State Police and her ability to be an AFSCME member [have] allowed my family to grow closer because she is able to be home more often. My family’s life would have been extremely different without AFSCME’s continual fight for its members and for that I am most thankful.”



Sophia Dailey

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Field Museum workers win first contract

MEMBERS OF FIELD MUSEUM Workers United/AFSCME overwhelmingly approved their first-ever union contract, with more than 94% voting yes to ratify the four-year agreement. Nearly 300 Field employees formed their union in March 2023, joining thousands of cultural workers across Illinois who have also organized local unions with AFSCME Council 31.

Melissa Anderson, a library collections and preservation specialist and a 20-year Field employee, said that Field employees were subject to what they called a “loyalty tax,” their term for how management used the museum’s world-class prestige and important mission to justify paying low wages.

Breaking the museum out of that way of thinking took effort. In March, employees organized a massive picket near the museum’s iconic front steps to get management’s attention when negotiations stalled.

“That was solidarity,” said Stanley Banks, a visitor services representative who served on the bargaining committee. “Museum guests were walking up and getting into the picket; some of them were members of other unions. That rally helped us create



Field Museum workers organized several strong actions which helped them secure their first union contract.

movement at the table.” Just weeks later, Field employees had an agreement. The contract delivers pay increases ranging from nearly 14% to more than 17% over its four-year term, as well as premium pay for bilingual skills and translation services and an improved retirement plan with dollar-for-dollar matching. The union also won crucial workplace protections, including the establishment of a grievance procedure and stronger disciplinary rights. “Having a grievance procedure—that’s major for us,” Anderson said. “We now

have things in place where someone can’t decide tomorrow that they’re going to fire you because of some random reason.” The agreement also brings housekeeping duties in-house and ensures those workers receive the union wages and benefits to which they’re entitled. “We created a strong foundation,” Banks said. “And now we’re ready to build on it.” The Field Museum bargaining committee included Anderson, Banks, Lileas Maier, Adrienne Stroup, Kate Swisher, Karl Bitikofer, Ogechi

Ike, Michelle O’Conner, Daryl Coldren, Quan West and Alfie Pritzl. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Christian Hains.

Two-year struggle leads to contract win at SAIC

AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS AT the bargaining table, non-tenure-track faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) achieved breakthrough

provisions in their first union contract: ironclad workplace rights and fair pay increases. Before they organized their union, the approximately 600 lecturers and adjunct professors at the prestigious art school had watched as management restricted their rights and used the school’s reputation as an excuse to pay them low wages. Through their union, they vowed to change that. The victory came after faculty faced stonewalling tactics from the administration, including months spent negotiating smaller issues like bulletin board placement. “We had administrators who had never been in a classroom trying to make decisions about our working conditions,” said Elena Ailes, an adjunct professor who served on the bargaining committee. Union members organized escalating actions designed to hold management’s feet to the fire. Management tried to discourage them, but they stayed united and determined. The final four-year agreement delivers pay raises of 16% for lecturers and 15% for adjuncts, expanded course guarantees, longer contracts for lecturers, and a health insurance stipend pool of up to \$5,000 per member. And the contract replaces the former internal grievance process—one subject to management’s whims—with a full-fledged grievance procedure that carries the force of their union contract.



Non-tenure-track faculty at the School of the Art Institute secured better pay and stronger protections in their first union contract.

For adjunct professor Eric Leonardson, the contract represents more than economic gains.

“This is going to create a cultural change—a more engaged and caring community, not just for us, but for our students,” he said.

Union members were so pleased with the contract that they did something remarkable: Every one of the 382

for meaningful raises. But the two locals had a secret weapon: unprecedented unity and a coordinated campaign plan.

“Between our two locals we have 1,500 people with workers in every county in Illinois,” said Ursulla Idleman, AFSCME Local 3700’s president.

Unity laid the foundation for a contract campaign that would achieve serious victories.

one—double what non-union employees elsewhere on campus received through the university’s standard increase.

“This is the largest across-the-board raise we’ve received in the 12 years I’ve been here,” said Ben Riegler, president of AFSCME Local 698.

The biggest victories went to the university’s most undervalued workers. Child care workers who previously started

process now guarantee workers at least 60 days of retroactive pay when they prove they’re doing higher-level work, ending years of bureaucratic delays.

The Local 698 bargaining committee included Riegler, Heidi Schwarz, Casandis Hunt, Robin Stuckemeyer, Rachel Dorney, Josh Garman and Jean Husmann.

The Local 3700 bargaining committee included Idleman, Shelly Estrada-Walters, Daniel Franco, Penny Hood, Cathy Keltz, Andrew Torrey, Tobi Wilder, Elizabeth Hartke, Anne Jackson, Della Jacobs, Kalen Mc Gowan and Siggi Schroth.

Both committees were led by Council 31 Staff Representative Christina DeAngelo.

The reopener gave the bargaining team an opportunity to address the problem well before the contract would have expired.

“It all ramped up very fast,” Local 1970 recording secretary Patty Fanella said. “This was an opportunity to get more money in people’s pockets now.”

To set the table for negotiations, members turned out for a meeting of the school board in a powerful showing.

“It was an appeal to say, ‘We are here. We care about our jobs,’” Fanella said.

The final contract that members ratified overwhelmingly on July 9 wins improvements in every key area where the local union sought to make them. On top of a \$3-an-hour across-the-board wage increase, they secured adjustments for dozens of employees so that their pay will better match their job duties. The average wage increase in the first year alone is 14.4%.

They also won improvements to comp time accrual and use for full-year employees, as well as health insurance upgrades and stronger disciplinary protections for all.

“This contract is evidence that our union fights for everyone,” said Cindy Infelise, Local 1970 president.

“The momentum is shifting,” Fanella said. “Ratifying this contract shows that we’re standing shoulder to shoulder. It shows we’re stronger when we’re united.”

The Local 1970 bargaining committee included Infelise, Rosario, Fanella, Melissa Traynor and Kimberly Lawler. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner.



The two UIUC AFSCME locals organized joint actions to put pressure on management to agree to fair contracts.

voting members voted Yes to ratify the contract.

“I feel transformed,” Ailes said. “I now see that change is possible.”

The committee included Ailes, Caroline Bellios, Elizabeth Cote, Michael Dorf, Keefer Dunn, Danny Floyd, Luna Jaskowiak, Annie Kielman, Leonardson, Kristi McGuire and Anjulie Rao. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.

The negotiations started slowly, with management dragging their feet on economic proposals. But when the locals launched coordinated actions—rallies at the provost’s office and powerful member testimonials—changes came.

The persistence paid off. Both locals secured a 4% total wage increase in year

at just \$15 per hour received an 8.5% increase in year one, followed by 3% raises in years two and three.

The contracts also broke new ground with the first-ever bilingual pay in University of Illinois history—an extra \$100 monthly for employees required to use languages other than English on the job. Major improvements to the job audit

Glenbard school employees gain momentum in new contract

IN EARLY 2025, GLENBARD School District management approached members of AFSCME Local 1970 who work for the district about reopening their contract two years early. Local union leaders were keenly aware of the problems facing their members: The cost of living was rising and they were falling behind. Many were doing work outside their job descriptions and weren’t being compensated fairly for it.

“We weren’t [getting] the wages we needed while working for a highly respected school district,” said Wendy Rosario, Local 1970’s vice president. “We needed to make a living wage.”

UIUC locals stick together to win breakthrough contracts

WHEN AFSCME LOCALS 3700 and 698 sat down for contract negotiations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, they knew they faced an uphill battle.

The university’s lowest-paid workers were struggling to get by on wages as low as \$15 per hour while management claimed there was no money



The AFSCME Local 1970 bargaining committee.

SHORT REPORTS

Veterans’ services under fire

WHEN YOU SIGN UP FOR MILITARY service, you’re agreeing to risk your life for your country. In return, the federal government promises veterans that they will have strong, secure benefits as long as they live. But the Trump administration is going back on the government’s end of that promise.

Upon taking office, the Trump crew immediately began mass firings throughout the federal government. At the Department of Veterans Affairs, thousands of employees have already been let go, with every indication that the damage will continue.

The VA is a lifeline for 16 million veterans, providing health care, processing service-related disability benefits, offering education assistance and more. It’s also the single largest employer of veterans, as 25% of its employees have served in the armed forces.

The Trump White House said in March that it intended to cut more than 80,000 jobs from the department, but it has now reduced that number to 30,000 after pressure from advocates and veterans.

That’s still a very big hit. The loss of so much of the VA workforce will surely mean longer wait times at VA clinics and hospitals and poorer quality services.

Veterans deserve better from the country they served.

Fighting nursing home privatization in Stephenson Co.

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 2399 and their allies in the community are fighting to prevent the sale of the Stephenson Nursing Center, also known as Walnut Acres, to a company with a troubling track record. This isn’t the first time the county has tried to sell the home to a for-profit buyer, despite strong evidence that for-profit homes tend to have worse patient outcomes and poor staffing. AFSCME defeated the



Members of AFSCME Local 2399 are stepping up to defend their public nursing home from another privatization effort.

county’s previous privatization effort in 2023, when union members drew attention to the would-be buyer’s disastrous past performance as a nursing home operator in other areas of the country. But now the county board is at it again. They’re considering a \$1.5 million offer from a company called Serenity Estates, which runs homes elsewhere in the state. A vote to sell the county home is now scheduled for July 18, although Stephenson County and the intended buyer will need to get regulatory

approval before the sale can move forward. AFSCME members are advocating strongly against the sale. At both the meeting in July and the community hearings related to the sale, they’re raising concerns about the character of the buyer, its past performance as a nursing home operator, and what privatization of the home could mean for the residents that they care for so deeply. County nursing homes are public goods that care for every aging resident regardless of ability to pay. AFSCME will

fight any effort to put them in the hands of for-profit companies only interested in extracting profit without regard for quality of care.

Supreme Court clears the way for shuttering US Dept. of Ed

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT delivered a significant blow to public education on July 14 when it ruled that President

Trump can continue his efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. Loss of the agency and the funding it provides could mean fewer teachers, more crowded classrooms and increased mental health and behavioral challenges for students. It could also mean fewer resources for schools in Illinois and across the nation, and a lower quality of education for millions of students at public schools. It will make it more difficult for prospective college students to access student loans and may hit AFSCME members with student loans particularly hard as the department administers the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. “The Department of Education ensures that all students, no matter their zip code, economic class or disability, can learn and thrive,” said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. “Tens of thousands of AFSCME members across the country have dedicated their careers to education, and we will continue to fight, regardless of this decision, to ensure that our students have every opportunity to succeed.” The shuttering of the Department of Education is being overseen by billionaire Linda McMahon. Corporate interests and billionaires like McMahon want to close the department to advance their longstanding goal of total privatization of public education. 🦅

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY WORKERS FIGHT ON

Museum employees are tired of management’s delays at the bargaining table while they fight for their first contract. In a picket the union organized in May, employees called out management for their disrespectful wage proposals and demanded a fair contract.

RETIREE NOTES

Retirees stand against Trump budget cuts to Medicare and Medicaid

SUB-CHAPTER 79 MEMBERS took action to urge Rep. Darin LaHood not to cut Medicare and Medicaid ahead of the vote on the federal budget.

“We felt it was important to stand in protest of these cuts. Together we delivered petitions to try to prevent Rep. LaHood’s vote in support of this legislation,” said Stephanie Soderstrum, president of Bloomington Sub-chapter 79.

LaHood eventually voted to pass the Republican budget bill that will knock 17 million people off Medicaid coverage.

His constituents, including members of Sub-chapter 79, felt betrayed by his vote.

“These cuts will really hurt seniors,” Soderstrum said.

Although the Medicaid cuts don’t take effect until 2027, they’re likely to hurt long-term care for the elderly by reducing nursing home reimbursement rates and cutting compensation for in-home caregivers.

What’s more, the Medicaid cuts will blow a big hole in the state budget, affecting every Illinois resident.

While Medicare wasn’t cut directly, the budget bill’s



Retirees and community advocates rallied outside Rep. Darin LaHood’s office in Normal to call him out for his vote to sell out his constituents.

massive \$4.5 trillion cost—mostly to lower taxes for millionaires, billionaires and big corporations—could trigger automatic cuts to it and other programs. Medicare payments would be reduced by 4%, a \$500 billion cut over eight years beginning in 2026. While the White House claims this won’t hurt beneficiaries, such steep reductions are likely to limit access or quality of care.

“All along the way, AFSCME retirees have fought against these cuts,”

Soderstrum said. “We don’t plan on stopping now that they’ve passed. We need to hold LaHood and others like him accountable.”

Taking on providers who overcharge retirees

HEALTH CARE COSTS ARE rising and can add up quickly,

especially for retirees. Thankfully, retirees from state service have contractual guarantees that their health care costs won’t exceed certain limits.

That’s why, when AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees learned that some retired state employee retirees were being gouged by rural health care providers, the union sprang into action.

Some participants in the State Employees Retirement System (SERS) who have Aetna TRAIL health insurance were being charged more than the 15% co-insurance rate that AFSCME’s union contract with the state of Illinois requires.

The union contacted the state Department of Central Management Services (CMS) and threatened to file a grievance if it didn’t immediately resolve the issue.

CMS ultimately agreed with the union’s position, directing Aetna and providers to bill per the contract so that retirees would be responsible for no more than 15%.

“By working together, we are able to maintain the retirement security that we worked for,” said David Spinner, president of Sub-chapter 87 in Decatur/Hillsboro. “Solidarity equals financial stability.”

Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act needed

SENIORS AND THE STATE and local programs that serve them are feeling the heat.

Programs funded under the federal Older Americans Act (OAA), which underpins state agencies on aging, may face disruption in light of the Trump administration’s organizational changes and staffing reductions at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which administers the programs and services authorized by the OAA.

These vital senior programs include Meals on Wheels, transportation services, state long-term care ombudsman programs, elder abuse prevention, caregiver support, elder rights and legal assistance, employment training, chronic disease prevention, and many more.

The Trump administration has imposed steep budget cuts on several HHS divisions and is purportedly planning to lay off 10,000 of the agency’s employees.

Older adults and people with disabilities rely on these programs to meet their basic needs and live independently. Without them, more older adults and people with disabilities will be forced onto the streets.



Members of Retiree Sub-chapter 79.



Gene Moore

CHAPLAIN II

LAWRENCE CORRECTIONAL CENTER

AFSCME Local 3600

Can you tell us about your job?

I serve as a chaplain with the Illinois Department of Corrections at Lawrence Correctional Center. I provide spiritual care, emotional support, and crisis counseling to individuals who are incarcerated. That includes everything from leading worship services and facilitating faith-based programs to being present during moments of grief, loss and personal transformation.

One unique aspect of my role is that I have to facilitate services for everyone, regardless of my own religious preference. It doesn't matter what faith background someone has; if they request services based on their religious affiliation, I need to provide that support. We serve many different religions, and inmates can fill out forms to change their religious affiliation or indicate their interests during orientation.

Why did you pursue being a chaplain in IDOC?

My calling to ministry started when I was 19 years old while serving active duty in the United States Navy as an operations specialist in Norfolk, Virginia. I was baptized at age 10 and had a really good chaplain role model in the Navy who served as a spiritual father figure. After my military service—13 years total, including eight years as a Navy Reserve chaplain—I pursued my education. I was called to this line of work.

Is your work fulfilling?

Absolutely. I believe every person, no matter their past, deserves dignity, compassion, and the opportunity for change. This calling allows me to meet people in some of the hardest seasons of their lives and remind them that they're not forgotten. It's not easy work, but it's meaningful work.

Here's an example. I remember one young man who lost his mother. His uncle and father

came to visit, and we made ourselves available for support. We provided whatever comfort we could during their time together, and I was able to have one-on-one conversations with him before he transferred to another facility to continue his education.

We also provide services during critical situations, like checking in on individuals after traumatic events, ensuring they have someone to talk to and express themselves.

What are some challenges of being a chaplain in a prison setting?

Unlike at my local church, where I primarily serve one faith community, in the prison system I have to be prepared to serve everyone

regardless of their religious background.

This means I need education and exposure to many different faiths. My biggest population is Muslim inmates, and I also provide Buddhist services through WebEx with a reverend who joins virtually. I stay open to learning from the inmates themselves. Many who practice their faith are in constant contact with us and help educate us about their religious needs and practices.

How do you serve prison staff?

Every morning when I'm there, I provide positive affirmations and a quote for the day to start everyone off with the right attitude. I make it a point to visit and check in on staff. I never know what someone might be going through until I'm actually present with them. I try to be available, positive, non-judgmental, and let people express themselves freely.

I believe in leading by example and being present where the spirit leads me each day. Whether it's checking in on a particular staff member or being available for whatever's asked of me, I approach every situation with a positive attitude.

How does your union help you succeed at work?

AFSCME gives chaplains like me a voice and ensures we're treated with respect and fairness on the job. The union advocates for safe working conditions, fair pay, and job security, so I can focus on serving others without having to worry about being unsupported or unheard. Knowing AFSCME has our backs makes a real difference.

I'm very active in attending union meetings, which keeps me informed about what's going on. I also serve on the IDOC programs committee as the subject matter expert for chaplaincy, helping evaluate religious programs that can benefit inmates. The people representing us through AFSCME really do make a big difference for each and every one of us.