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ILLINOIS COUNCIL 31
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY
AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES - AFL-CIO

ON THE MOVE

2026

Up for the fight!

FED FUNDING CUTS HIT ILLINOIS PAGE 3

AI ON THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA PAGE 4

FIX TIER 2 FIGHT GOES ON PAGE 7

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AFSCME Council 31
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE'VE SHOWN TIME AND TIME AGAIN THAT AFSCME IS A FIGHTING UNION.

Ready for the battles to come

We are living in a time of great turmoil and uncertainty. Over the course of just one year, we have witnessed a massive assault on the federal government that is wreaking havoc on public services long considered vital to the national order and led to the firings of hundreds of thousands of federal employees.

Early on, the Trump administration began issuing warnings of massive cutbacks in federal funding to state and local governments. The targets and the timing and the amounts all vary, but there's little doubt that the threats are real and the potential impact devastating.

Over that same time span, far less visible to the naked eye, there have been dozens of deals done, taxes cut, favors handed out—all without appropriate oversight—in order to further enrich the already super-rich of our country.

AFSCME represents several thousand employees in the federal government and our national union has been in the forefront of the legal battles challenging the ferocious assault on federal programs and workers. Those legal clashes are ongoing.

Here in Illinois, we have refused to be deterred by the chaos emanating from D.C. Our most important mission is to continue to work every day to improve members' lives, to build a fierce fighting force that can face whatever attacks come, and to stand in solidarity to uphold labor's firm conviction: An injury to one is an injury to all.

Council 31 members can be very proud of what we accomplished over the past year. Dozens of local unions sat across the bargaining table from their employers to negotiate new contracts. They stirred up member activism, took to the picket lines, and even prepared to go out on strike—determined to secure the wages, benefits and rights that build our union ever stronger and make our members' lives so much better. In every instance—some 70 contracts in all—we made real gains!

We continued to build our power on the political and legislative fronts. We helped to forge a public sector labor coalition that put the urgency of fixing Tier 2 pensions on the legislative radar. And we enacted a number of new laws that will greatly expand the rights and protections of union members. Moreover, we blocked a number of bills that would have reduced our rights, jeopardized our jobs, or fostered privatization of public services.

We were able to make those gains on so many fronts in large measure because we have continued to grow our union. More than a dozen new units—ranging from school bus drivers, to librarians, to lawyers—have joined our AFSCME family. And we made sure that every new employee in own workplaces understands the vital importance of being a union member.

All of that progress, however, is now put in jeopardy by the destructive policies emanating from the White House and Congress. We saw the impact almost immediately when our Tier 2 reform legislation hit a brick wall last May as state legislators began to grasp the harsh reality of massive cutbacks in federal funding to vital state services.

The impact of budget cuts on a scale never seen before is still hard to comprehend.

What we do understand all too well is that Illinois could lose as much as $1 billion in federal funding over the next year. It will be very tough for the state to raise enough new revenues to replace that kind of money. So essential programs to help those in need, such as child care, TANF, SNAP and Medicaid are all in jeopardy. What's more, the jobs of thousands of public employees, many of them AFSCME members, are also in jeopardy as public bodies are forced to make hard decisions about how to allocate their drastically reduced revenues.

We also understand that the American labor movement now has a large target painted on its back. We have seen how the Trump administration has acted unilaterally—and surely, illegally—to terminate all union contracts in effect in the federal workforce and to strip more than a million employees of their collective bargaining rights.

All of this in just one year! We really cannot even imagine what the next three will bring. But we do know that the playbook is Project 2025, which explicitly urges congressional action to ban all public employee unions at all levels of government. In other words, the very survival of public sector labor unions is on the line.

It's up to all of us to continue to move forward into this uncharted territory—to be better prepared, more determined, and more unified than ever; to be ready to stand up for ourselves and for each other at every turn; and to join with other unions to defend fundamental labor rights.

No doubt we're in for some very rough times—unlike anything we've ever experienced. But there is one thing we know for certain: AFSCME is a fighting union. We've shown that time and again. We took on Bruce Rauner and became a national symbol of fightback. We built our PEOPLE program into one of the most effective in the nation. We've demonstrated that we're not afraid to stand up to any employer to secure the contracts we deserve.

So let's lean into the fight. Let's be prepared for what we know is coming. Let's put aside all the petty things that can preoccupy us and focus on the very real threats that can destroy us. Let's bring our courage and determination to the forefront. And let's make our core value—fairness for all—our clarion call and our guiding light. That's our challenge for 2026. I have no doubt that we can rise to meet it.

Council 31 AFSCME We Make Illinois Happen

ON THE MOVE

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Public services and unions are under fire

The landscape is getting tougher for working. From cutting funding for crucial programs that help families make ends meet to the unilateral termination of union contracts, the challenges continue to grow.

Funding cuts spell danger for Illinois' budget and economy

ANTI-WORKER POLITICIANS have slashed funding for health care, public service jobs and essential programs, pushing layoffs and service cuts across our communities. While families are cutting back on groceries and other basics, President Trump and Republicans in Congress are handing corporations even more tax breaks. And they're even coming after basic freedoms like workplace safety, retirement security, and our voice on the job.

Now the federal chaos is closing in on Illinois. According to a report from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute, the current wave of project cancellations, funding cuts, mass firings of federal employees, and cuts to funding for crucial public services threatens to shrink Illinois' economy by $10 billion per year and result in the loss of 86,000 jobs.

The report also finds that these program cuts will cause hundreds of thousands of Illinois residents to lose access to health insurance coverage and food assistance, while shrinking state revenues by more than $1 billion per year.

In addition to economic damage and the loss of jobs, the report finds that the Trump cuts will hit the poorest Illinoisans the hardest. At least 270,000 Illinois residents will lose Medicaid coverage, another 216,000 will lose access to food stamps, and at least 100,000 will lose their health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. At the same time, the average family's energy bills will increase by up to $186 per year in the next five years.

AFSCME members are on the job every day to make sure that the residents of our state have access to the services they need, but Trump's cuts are already destabilizing state finances and making it more difficult for AFSCME members to provide the public services that Illinoisans rely upon.

Meanwhile, because of the so-called "Big, Beautiful Bill," billionaires are getting enormous tax handouts.

Trump shreds dozens of union contracts in massive assault on union rights

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION has fixed its sights on unions, terminating protections that cover more than 1 million federal employees.

The administration has torn up contract after contract, including those covering federal correctional officers, health care workers at the VA, TSA agents and more.

The termination of these collective bargaining agreements has led to the immediate cancellation of certain rights and benefits. For example, without a union contract to protect them and their rights, 400,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs lost four weeks of paid parental leave their contract had previously afforded them.

There were pettier cruelties as well. One of the first things the TSA did after cancelling union contracts was take away water stations for employees.

Members of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest union representing federal workers, have been hit hardest.

Jason Anderson, AFGE's national vice president covering a region that includes Illinois, said that the past year has been incredibly difficult for federal union members.

"These are people that are serving the American people. They're not serving for their own profit," Anderson said. "But hundreds of thousands of federal workers are living in fear right now."

Without union contracts, workers no longer have the right to have a union rep present in disciplinary meetings. There's no more grievance procedure.

"We need to understand what's at stake at this moment," Anderson said. "The attacks on federal workers and federal unions are just the start. If they can come after federal civil servants and labor unions, what's going to stop them from coming after everyone else?"

AFSCME fights back against public service funding cuts

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 HAS joined AFSCME International, AFSCME Council 57 of Oakland, Calif., and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to file a lawsuit challenging the administration's partisan and unlawful cuts to vital social services funding in Illinois and four other states.

The cuts total more than $10 billion, with $2.4 billion slashed from the Child Care and Development Fund, $7.35 billion in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and $869 million in Social Services Block Grant Funding, which includes funding for child welfare programs and job training for adults.

AFSCME's lawsuit argues that the cuts are a brazenly partisan move, taking crucial assistance only from states the president lost in the 2024 election.

This violates a law called the Administrative Procedure Act by ignoring the legal process for stopping funding to essential programs and targeting certain states for politically motivated reasons.

AFSCME members who work for the Illinois Departments of Human Services and Child and Family Services are among the workers that administer these grants and assist families in getting the help that they need.

There are also many AFSCME members who administer these programs on the local level. Members of AFSCME Local 900 who work for Champaign County, for example, run an early childhood education center where 85% of the families receive assistance through the funds.

"These services form the backbone of our economy, but instead of strengthening them, this administration is cruelly and illegally targeting child care providers, children and working parents to settle a political score," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders.

WHEN EXTREME WEATHER HITS, AFSCME MEMBERS SPRING TO ACTION

Members of AFSCME Local 1669 who work for the city of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services were out all night in -20 windchills to check on people experiencing homelessness, helping them find a shelter and handing out dry socks and warm gloves.

All hands on deck needed to pass DSP wage increase

Direct support professionals (DSPs) will return to the Capitol to fight for a living wage again this spring, but a tough budget year means that every AFSCME-represented DSP will have a role to play in the coming effort.

DSPs are caregivers. Working for private, usually not-for-profit organizations, they support people with developmental or intellectual disabilities, handling every aspect of their daily care. That can include taking their individuals on outings, making sure they're fed and get their medications—and most importantly, helping them build the skills they need to live fulfilling lives.

Despite the vital importance of their work, the state of Illinois—which is responsible for funding such care—for decades allocated miserly sums for DSP wages.

Then AFSCME got involved. As employees at dozens of these nonprofit agencies joined together to form unions with Council 31, they began to realize the power that comes with collective action. They no longer depended on their employers to deal with the state. Instead, AFSCME members from across Illinois banded together and sought to make change by directly lobbying the state legislature for higher wages.

They made sure that legislators understood the importance of their work to aid individuals with serious developmental disabilities—and the difficulties such work entails. And they succeeded.

Thanks to their united efforts, DSPs have made big progress toward better pay in recent years.

"In other states, these jobs don't pay very much," said Tinamarie Hare, a DSP at the Ray Graham Association and a member of AFSCME Local 3492. "But because of our union, we have a united front that allows us to fight for living wages at the State Capitol."

When DSPs head to the Capitol to lobby for wages, they're doing so in support of AFSCME-backed bills that increase the amount of state funding for disability services. AFSCME then pushes for the passage of a bill that would require providers to pass that additional funding on to workers in the form of wages.

This year, federal cuts and a projected state budget shortfall make things more difficult.

A significant part of the state's funding comes from the federal government through programs such as Medicaid. President Trump and his anti-union backers in Congress cut nearly a trillion dollars in Medicaid funding over the next 10 years—blowing a big hole in the state budget and making it even harder to pay for disability services.

As a result, the state is projecting a $2 billion deficit. When the legislature begins the process of creating and passing a budget for fiscal year 2027, lawmakers are likely to be skeptical of any new spending—including for higher DSP wages.

That means that this year will require all hands on deck. To overcome lawmakers' wariness of passing new spending, DSPs will need to stand up together and make their voices heard loud and clear.

"We all provide for people at work every day," said Dustin Jones, a DSP and the president of AFSCME Local 1268 at Kreider Services. "Now we need to make sure we can provide for our families at home by passing this wage increase. We all need to come together to make it happen."

A group of DSPs deliver stacks of petitions demanding fair wages to Gov. Pritzker's office during the 2025 lobby day.

AFSCME puts AI on the legislative agenda

Since the launch of OpenAI's ChatGPT in 2022, artificial intelligence has ballooned into an industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars. Now, from commercials to social media feeds to the top of every Google search, it seems like AI is everywhere.

The billionaires and large corporations behind the AI boom are all in on the technology, selling it to both public and private sector organizations on the promise of AI's ability to "improve efficiency" through automating millions of jobs and replacing human workers with chatbots.

That's in spite of the fact that many deployments of AI in the public sector have been disasters—like New York City's small-business chatbot, which told business owners that it's legal to fire a worker who complains about sexual harassment.

As the humans providing vital public services to Illinois residents every day, AFSCME members understand the threat that AI poses to our livelihoods and those dependent on the services we provide.

That's why delegates to the recent AFSCME Council 31 Biennial Convention unanimously adopted a resolution that commits our union to work to prevent AI from displacing workers and degrading public services.

In the spring session of the Illinois General Assembly that's getting underway now, Council 31 has developed a bill meant to ensure that AFSCME members' work can't be replaced by AI, and any AI-generated output is subject to strict human oversight and control.

Council 31 is also researching the potential impact of AI in union members' workplaces, and working to establish trainings for staff and members on how to approach the issue at the bargaining table and in labor-management meetings.

"We're all hearing how 'amazing' AI is going to be for society, but we unionists know that the implementation of artificial intelligence will only be positive if we fight to ensure that it is used to help workers, not to make their jobs harder, less safe, or non-existent," said Council 31 Regional Director Dave Beck, who also served on the State of Illinois' AI Task Force. "Our members should be on guard against the use of AI in our workplaces and let our local leadership know if management tries to introduce it."

It's all too likely that the billionaires and tech CEOs will fight tooth and nail against the AI regulations that AFSCME is supporting. But together we can make sure that strong public services remain in the hands of committed human beings.

MEET THE AFSCME MEMBERS WHO PROTECT YOUR PENSION

A pension is the most secure and stable retirement you can get. To make sure it stays that way, AFSCME members can rest easy knowing that their fellow union members have seats on the Cook County, state employees, and municipal employees pension boards to provide oversight, set investing strategies and solve problems for members.

With hundreds of thousands of retirements and billions of dollars at stake, having strong union oversight on pension boards guards against political pressure, keeps funds accountable and puts the interests of workers and retirees first.

AFSCME members who have a public pension have a say in who is representing them, and whenever elections come around, we can vote for other AFSCME members who actually have skin in the game like we do.

Get to know the AFSCME members who are serving on your pension board, making sure your pension fund stays strong.

Kevin Ochalla
Cook County Pension Fund
AFSCME Local 3315

"Serving on the pension board is important to me because our members deserve a voice in how our retirement money is managed. It's our contributions, alongside the employer's, and those funds need to be invested wisely for the long-term security of every worker and retiree we represent.

"When I first joined the board, I quickly realized how vital this work is for the 12,000 active members and 20,000 annuitants who rely on the Cook County Pension Fund for stability and dignity in retirement. Each month, we review expenses, approve retirements, monitor investments, and ensure the fund stays on track toward full funding—because the stronger the fund is, the better we can support members, including lowering retiree healthcare costs."

David Schultz
State Employees Retirement System
AFSCME Local 1019

"As union members who pay into and will one day rely on these pensions, it's vital that our voices are part of the decisions that shape them. When we have union voices on pension boards, we can work to ensure that our pensions are stable and well-funded.

"As with all things when it comes to public employees, if we're not at the table, then we're on the menu—and having AFSCME members on the board ensures our voices are heard."

Doug Cycholl
Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund
AFSCME Local 337

"We need to have a voice in how our money is invested and spent. Ultimately, that is our money—not the pension fund's. The trustees are a voice for the members.

I've received numerous complaints over the last several months from people not receiving their pensions or their death benefits. We're able to elevate those complaints quickly and get them addressed. So far not one complaint that has been given to me has not been addressed immediately.

"Every pension is based on investments, and you want a bang for your buck. You want a ten-fold return. But you also want to make sure that the companies that we're investing in aren't breaking down conditions for other workers and unions. We are a voice not just for our workers, but others as well."

Jack Matthews
State Employees Retirement System
AFSCME Local 1964

"I ran for the board to represent members' interests in any changes the Board might consider.

"Many members don't realize that SERS itself doesn't handle investments—the Illinois State Board of Investment does, with oversight from us on the Board of Trustees. That's why strong voices in the oversight process matter, especially to guard against political pressures that could harm members' retirement security."

Arnold Black
State Employees Retirement System
AFSCME Local 2971

"Serving on the SERS board has shown me how much work goes into protecting our future. I stepped up after learning what the board really does. I didn't know the extent of it—death, disability, out-of-state cases—there's so much that members never see but that truly matters.

"As vice-chairman of the SERS board, I want members to know they have representatives with their best interests at heart. AFSCME has a real voice on this board, making sure our pensions are well-funded."

John Tilden
State Employees Retirement System (Retiree Representative)
AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 66

"I first ran for a seat on the State Employee Retirement System board as a way to give back to our union. I quickly came to appreciate how incredibly dedicated the SERS staff are. Before serving as a trustee, I had no idea how complex the system is or how hard these professionals work to ensure retirees receive their benefits.

"Getting members accurate information about their pensions, legislation and contributions—as well as helping them access their benefits—it always helps to have someone who knows what you need on your side."

Chicago cultural workers forge ahead after organizing

Museum of Science and Industry employees win higher wages in first contract

EMPLOYEES OF THE Museum of Science & Industry have won significant wage increases, holiday pay, and other improvements in their first union contract.

Members of Museum of Science and Industry Workers United (MSIWU)/AFSCME approved the contract's terms in a near-unanimous vote held in November. The local, representing more than 120 MSI employees, was formed in July 2023.

The new contract includes a number of notable gains, including:

- Immediate pay raises of 8 to 10%
- Annual raises of 3%
- A higher starting wage
- Time-and-a-half holiday pay for part-time employees
- Many non-economic provisions, including rules covering remote work, disciplinary procedures, and more.

"It was a tough fight, but by standing together, we—the workers who make the museum happen—made real gains for ourselves and our families," MSIWU bargaining committee member Santi Van Lysebettens said. "And this is only the beginning. We've laid a strong foundation that together in our union we can build on for years to come."

The agreement came after nearly two years of negotiations that saw workers take escalating actions outside the museum, culminating in a vote by union members to authorize a strike.

Workers had announced their intent to walk off the job on Nov. 29—the Saturday after Thanksgiving, traditionally a very busy day at the museum. But the final scheduled bargaining session yielded an agreement after seven hours of negotiations that went late into the night.

The bargaining committee include Van Lysebettens, David Dowd, Scott Hanada, Josh Garcia, Zach Kelchen and Tara Foster. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis.

Adler Planetarium workers win union vote

ON DEC. 11, EMPLOYEES OF Chicago's Adler Planetarium voted overwhelmingly to form their union, Adler Planetarium Workers United (APWU), with AFSCME Council 31.

Planetarium workers identified several issues that prompted them to organize, including short-staffing, scheduling, low wages and the desire to have a voice in the decisions that impact their working lives.

"This union is a way to connect with each other and say we see and care about each other's struggles," said Dylan Borgerding, a member of the organizing committee and a public observing educator at the planetarium.

APWU is the 11th group of Chicago cultural employees to organize a union with Council 31 since 2020, joining workers from the Art Institute of Chicago, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (staff and non-tenure-track faculty), the Newberry Library, the Field Museum, the Chicago Academy of Sciences/Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Chicago History Museum.

Chicago History Museum workers protest management's anti-union retaliation against employees.

Chicago History Museum workers persevere

AFTER WORKERS AT THE Chicago History Museum formed their union in early 2025, they were eager to hit the ground running. But instead of working together with employees to build a better museum, management embarked on a bitter campaign of anti-union firings and intimidation.

They weaponized discipline against workers who had taken pro-union stances. Some employees were terminated, others laid off or had their hours reduced from full-time to half-time, all without warning. AFSCME has filed a series of unfair labor practice charges that are pending before the National Labor Relations Board.

Meanwhile, first-contract negotiations started in early July. Since then, management has put up roadblocks to slow the process down, coming to the bargaining table unprepared and failing to respond to proposals made by the union bargaining committee.

On Jan. 7, museum CEO Donald Lassere—the leader of the anti-union campaign—announced his resignation. In a statement to the news media, AFSCME said, "This moment is an opportunity for the board to turn the page from harmful cuts and anti-worker retaliation. We urge them to select a new leader who will value and work together with employees and our union to make the museum a better place for all."

Shedd Aquarium workers march towards first contract

HAVING PREVAILED OVER management's anti-union misinformation campaign to win their vote to form a union by a wide margin, AFSCME members at the Shedd Aquarium are making progress on the path to their first union contract.

The Shedd workers' bargaining team has covered important ground since negotiations started in May 2025. They've reached tentative agreements on issues like establishing a labor-management committee, lowering the length of the probationary period for new employees and codifying robust non-discrimination safeguards.

They're conducting the fight away from the bargaining table too with strong outreach and camaraderie. Their contract campaign has kept co-workers active and informed, with regular check-in calls, site visits, sticker days and even a union-organized beach party.

Well on their way to their first union contract, Shedd employees will continue the fight until the job is done.

Shedd Aquarium workers have made steady progress at the bargaining table since forming their union in the summer of 2024.

Fix Tier 2 campaign goes on despite fiscal woes

After a lifetime of public service, AFSCME members who work for the state, local governments or universities deserve better than the inadequate benefits that Tier 2 pensions provide. Applicable to anyone hired since 2011, Tier 2 benefits don't keep pace with the cost of living and fail to provide stability in retirement. That's why we're fighting to improve benefits for Tier 2 participants.

AFSCME members have been at the forefront of the fight to fix Tier 2.

It was always going to be an uphill battle, but the fight for pension fairness just got harder. The Trump administration's massive cuts to federal funding for state and local governments have made lawmakers deeply uneasy about supporting any new expenditures that could further burden the budget.

"With the uncertainty about revenues, lawmakers are going to be extremely hesitant about passing any measures that raise the state's expenditures," said Joanna Webb-Gauvin, Council 31's director of political and legislative affairs. "That doesn't mean fixing Tier 2 is dead—it just means it's going to be a lot harder."

Over the past two years, the We Are One Illinois coalition of unions—of which Council 31 is a leading member—has made significant progress. By holding town hall meetings statewide, sending thousands of calls and emails to legislators, and coordinating a massive lobby day and rally at the Capitol, we've put pension improvement on the agenda.

But that progress hit a wall in the 2025 spring legislative session as the funding cuts brought about by the Trump administration and its anti-worker backers came into stark relief.

Every day that legislators delay action, the Tier 2 crisis grows. So We Are One Illinois is continuing to organize statewide to make sure that legislators understand what having an inadequate pension means for public-sector workers.

Lawmakers need to hear about the real-world impact—whether it's a retirement age that keeps people working longer than is reasonable or a cost-of-living increase that doesn't keep up with everyday expenses. And telling those stories is going to be more important than ever.

The outlook is highly uncertain, and the political winds are shifting every day as Springfield hangs on new revenue forecasts and awaits news of further cuts to federal funding. But we're not giving up.

Lobbyists from We Are One Illinois coalition unions including, AFSCME Council 31, still have fixing Tier 2 atop our legislative agendas. At some point during the legislative session, an urgent call to action may be issued on short notice. When that time comes, every AFSCME member will need to mobilize to help pass fixes to Tier 2.

State appellate defenders made their case for unionization

When the employees in the Illinois Office of the State Appellate Defender (OSAD) began talking about unionizing, they faced a major issue: Under current Illinois law, state public defenders are unable to form a union without their employer's voluntary recognition. So to win a union, AFSCME Council 31 and OSAD employees would need to convince the head of the office to agree to recognize them.

Undeterred by the challenge, OSAD employees set out to organize. In speaking with coworkers, Assistant Appellate Defender Ross Allen said improving wages was a major driver of interest in joining a union.

"This is a job where we're not paid on a similar level to not only the private sector, but even that competitively with other public sector jobs," Allen said. "They think because we love our jobs, we should be willing to work for less."

Another priority was regaining some of the flexibility offered during the pandemic that management has begun to claw back in recent years.

Once enough people in the office expressed interest, OSAD employees created an organizing committee, and set out to get their coworkers to sign union cards. In just eight days, the committee reached a majority.

The next step was presenting the cards to the employer and arguing their case for voluntary recognition. The organizing committee wrote a letter, explaining how a union would improve the agency as a whole.

"When we started the process, most people didn't think voluntary recognition was a viable path. But that turned out to be a wrong assumption," Allen said.

Ultimately, AFSCME came to an agreement with management codified in a memorandum of understanding on voluntary recognition—but requested to delay the process by two months in order to secure the support of the OSAD Board of Commissioners. Then when the board met in December, it overwhelmingly supported the workers' decision, clearing the last hurdle for union representation.

With voluntary recognition accomplished, OSAD employees now turn to the work of negotiating their first contract and securing the better wages and working conditions they deserve.

> "They think because we love our jobs, we should be willing to work for less."
>
> ASSISTANT APPELLATE DEFENDER
>
> ROSS ALLEN

WHAT'S YOUR PROUDEST UNION MOMENT?

Our union depends on dedicated, knowledgeable stewards, determined bargaining committee members, passionate organizers, and scores of rank-and-file activists to continue building an ever-stronger fighting force.

At Council 31's recent Biennial Convention, activists from across the state had their chance to share the union moment they're proudest of—no matter how big or how small. Here is what some of them had to say.

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Becoming A Union Steward #2794

L.R. Taylor

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Testifying @ a Legislative Hearing for DSP's ACROSS our STATE!

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

House calling as a VMO changed My life!

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

When my daughter won an AFSCME scholarship of $2,000- for college!

Quizsanda
Local 1669

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

WINNING A RETALIATION GRIEVANCE THAT RESULTED IN MEMBER RECIEVING $7000+ IN TRANSPORTATION/CHILDCARE REIMBURSEMENT. WHICH THEY WERE ABLE TO USE TO MAKE THEIR FAMILY WHOLE IN A CRISIS SITUATION.

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

IN 2022 over whelmed By the support that are local had at are Ralley after the strike vote

Shawn Echols
Membership Chairperson
LOCAL
1110

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ALL IN 24TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2025

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

When I met my husband and he joined the Union.

Local 3237

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Having a Board of Trustees meeting @ SIUE & asking other Unions to please join us in the fight & 11 different unions come! WE WERE LOUD & clearly heard! Also invited Tim Drea/AFL-CIO Pres. & he spoke & made the Chancellor --- SPEECHLESS! WORTH IT! Thank you everyone! Local 2887 we were truly blessed that day!

Julie LaTempt-Brauer

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Winning our union in a landslide election!

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

When Anna Veterans Home became Union in 1995.

L-3280

Bonnie Blumm

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Teaching my co-workers why we need a union, and seeing the spark of understanding in their eyes.

MY PROUDEST UNION MOMENT IS:

Our New Contract

Ended up on News and Pantagraph paper 80+ People showed up and Showed Out at school board Meeting 2024!

Local 2608

DeDe Bridges

Higher education employees won't back down

AFSCME members who work for colleges and universities know how rewarding a career in higher education can be.

But it can also be tough.

Higher education employees maintain and clean buildings and grounds, including clearing snow from campus, prepare and serve food, keep departments running smoothly, help students in campus libraries, teach classes and more.

No matter how difficult the work can be, AFSCME members in higher education know the importance of standing together—and from one end of the state to the other, they can feel the difference it makes to be a union member on campus.

Mary Brown

Culinary Worker III
Eastern Illinois University

AFSCME Local 981

"Being an AFSCME member has helped me realize that there are other like-minded people that care deeply about being able to earn a paycheck that can help take care of our families and about safeguarding our rights as employees. We, as employees, have a right to earn a living wage, have our rights protected, and have safe working conditions."

Heather Carper

Image Processing Technician
Northeastern Illinois University

AFSCME Local 1989

"Our work is extremely siloed across departments. Oftentimes decisions are being made at the top without a clear picture of how they impact those who carry out the work. Having a voice at the table through collective bargaining not only helps our members, but the working-class families we serve."

Robbie Vermillion

Office Manager
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

AFSCME Local 698

"Being part of AFSCME means protection and job security. I know many people who are not protected by unions who live in the constant mentality that they are on probation at all times. Organizing together shows solidarity and increases the likelihood of employees to be treated fairly by the university. We are an integral part of the functioning of the university and should not be taken for granted."

Erika Stevenson

Building Service Worker
Illinois State University

AFSCME Local 1110

"I like seeing the difference I make for students every day, cleaning my area and knowing that I'm appreciated. Organizing in our union helps make sure we have safe jobs and better wages and keeps our morale up."

Kathleen Baker

Adult Educator
City Colleges of Chicago

AFSCME Local 3506

"We have the unique opportunity to be part of the magic that happens when people try to be the best versions of themselves. The triumph of that uplifts not only the students, but the communities they participate in also. Having a union on campus means consistently communicating, standing together, and strengthening and growing the unit so that when the strength of unity is necessary, we have it in abundance."

Jessica Martin

Conservation Lab Technician, Milner Library
Illinois State University

AFSCME Local 3236

"My job is to improve access to knowledge and culture, and to preserve it for future generations. My union helps to ensure that I am treated fairly and compensated appropriately while doing so."

Council 31 Convention Recap: We're All In!

October brought some 500 delegates, alternates and guests to Springfield for AFSCME Council 31's 24th biennial convention.

The theme of the convention was "All In," and over those two days, delegates made clear that when it comes to the fight for fairness and justice at work, they are indeed ready to give their all.

Powerful messages

Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch opened the convention with a stirring speech that provided an overview of the battles our union has waged—and won, as well as the challenges ahead.

Several special guests also helped to inspire and energize delegates.

International Union President Lee Saunders provided rousing remarks that emphasized the importance of unity at a time when public-sector workers are under unrelenting threats from the Trump administration in Washington, D.C.

State Sen. Robert Peters accepted Council 31's Community Support Award for his unwavering dedication to supporting the rights of workers seeking to form unions, and for promoting legislation in the Illinois General Assembly that supports public services and labor rights.

Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea recounted his early years as an activist in the United Mine Workers of America and his service in the U.S. Marine Corps, providing a powerful critique of the alarming cuts to veterans' health care and other vital services included in Trump and Congressional Republicans' so-called "Big Beautiful Bill."

Jason Anderson, a regional vice president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE, the largest union of federal employees), described the damage done by the Trump administration's termination of the collective bargaining rights of federal workers.

Action taken

Convention attendees voted overwhelmingly in support of a constitutional amendment to restructure Council 31 dues, effective July 1, 2026. The Council will soon send out a detailed explanation of the new dues plan.

Delegates also approved resolutions to guide our union's priorities and strategies over the next two years, including resolutions that:

- Reaffirm our commitment to continue growing our union through organizing the unorganized.
- Vow to continue the fight for safe working conditions in state prisons and juvenile centers.
- Pledge our union's support to besieged federal workers.
- Take a hard stance on artificial intelligence and commit our union to standing against any proposal to replace the work of human beings with AI.

Electing officers

Delegates unanimously voted to re-elect Roberta Lynch to lead our union as its executive director. Delegates also elected a new Council 31 Executive Board; many veteran activists were re-elected to their posts, and many leaders joined the board for the first time.

(From left) Deputy Director Mike Newman, AFSCME International President Lee Saunders and Executive Director Roberta Lynch after Saunders addressed delegates.

Information shared

Some 20 workshop sessions on a broad range of topics engaged and informed all those in attendance. Workshops included Understanding Labor Arbitration, The Impact of Federal Budget Cuts on Illinois, Waging a Successful Contract Campaign, and Resolving Workplace Issues.

Honoring union activists

Council 31 Associate Director Tracey Abman led delegates in giving a roaring, rocking welcome to the dozens of workers in attendance from newly formed AFSCME local unions. And awards were presented to three longtime members who've gone above and beyond to help strengthen their locals:

- Steward of the Year: Eric Rohman, AFSCME Local 1805, for his unwavering resolve to fight for his members' rights.

Members of AFSCME Local 1787 speak in support of a resolution pledging support for veterans.

- Public Service Award: Mark Bramm, AFSCME Local 46, for leadership of his local's annual coat drive, which has made sure hundreds of children in their community have the warm winter clothes they need.
- Jane Fitzgerald-Gloria Arseneau Award: Cecelia Phillips, AFSCME Local 900, for her courageous leadership in preparing her local union to strike for a fair contract.

Strengthening solidarity

Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman closed the weekend with a motivating speech that stressed the importance of unity when those in power are seeking to divide us. Throughout convention, delegates demonstrated their determination to carry forward the commitment to protect our rights, our standard of living, our communities, and our future—and to join arms with others who share the commitment to freedom and justice in our nation.

Some 500 delegates, guests and alternates met in Springfield where, over the course of two days, they charted Council 31's path for the next two years.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Threat of strike helps win fair contract

Members of AFSCME Local 473 make the gears of justice turn for Winnebago County.

MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 473 who work for the Winnebago County Circuit Clerk make the gears of justice move. Announcing court cases, scheduling court dates, keeping track of mountains of paperwork—they do it all.

But with the rising cost of living, union members were feeling squeezed. They needed to make up ground in their new union contract.

To make their voices heard by management, workers put union signs up in their offices and in yards throughout the county. Members proudly displayed them on their windshields when they came to work every day.

The height of the pressure came at a county board meeting, where members formed a wall-to-wall sea of AFSCME green, and told the county board that they were willing to walk off the job on strike if that's what it took to get the fair contract they knew they were worth.

"We knew we had to fight for what we believe in. We had to fight for what is right and what we deserve," said Missy MacFadden, Local 473's treasurer and a member of the bargaining committee.

Solidarity was building. After that, they even had retired members who came and asked for signs for their yard.

"They told us, 'If you're going to strike, we'll walk with you,'" MacFadden said.

The pressure worked.

The final contract ratified by members raises wages by an average of 21.9% over four years and raises retention pay for the longest-serving employees. The contract also adds an extra personal day and raises the cap on the amount of comp time that can be earned, effectively providing more time off.

"We all came together, we stood together, and we made this the best contract we could," MacFadden said.

The committee included MacFadden, Katie Wisocki, Jackie Lindquist, Michelle Dollak and Jenny Zammuto. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Cody Dornes.

NIU employees demand respect from university

IN BARGAINING FOR THEIR new union contract, the members of AFSCME Local 1890 set out to change the way Northern Illinois University treats its employees.

It wasn't just about winning fair wages; it was about making the university respect them and the contributions they make to the university every day.

"A lot of people look at civil service as low-level, like our jobs don't matter," said Jessie Alex, an office manager and member of the Local 1890 bargaining committee. "We make significant contributions to our university and the students, but some higher-level people don't take that seriously. We wanted to make sure that we are seen as equals."

Over an eight-month contract campaign, union members spoke out at several Board of Trustees meetings, sending a clear message to university administration: We matter.

"We wanted to show them that we are people," Alex said. "The administration gets lost in the numbers. We wanted to show them that we're not just numbers on a spreadsheet—we're human beings."

Next on their action list, the local took the fight directly to the top. Union members gathered hundreds of signatures on a letter to the university president demanding fairness and respect.

Accompanied by a local TV news crew, a delegation of members marched to the president's office to deliver the letter. The action turned up the heat on the university to settle the contract. And quickly thereafter, an agreement was reached.

The contract that was ratified by the local's nearly 500 members raises the starting wage to $18 an hour and provides wage increases for most members that exceed the university-wide standard. Plus, next year, members are guaranteed a raise up to 1% higher than the university-wide increase.

Crucially, the contract is set to expire in three years—the same expiration date as the other AFSCME affiliate on campus, Local 963. That means that the two locals will be able to join forces and more effectively leverage their size and power the next time their contracts expire.

The bargaining committee included Alex, Rave Meyer, Sarah Lindell, Gina Garcia, Tom Kapraun, Julie Jackson-Weindorf, Felicia Owens, Krys Kamka, Martha Villagomez, Lesly Schoo and Jake DaSilva. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Rick Surber.

Members of AFSCME Local 1890 speak out at a Board of Trustees meeting.

Local 699 gives a little to win a lot

WHEN THEY STARTED NEGOTIATING their new contract, the members of AFSCME Local 699 who work for the city of Bloomington had a plan. They knew what management wanted and they were going to use it as leverage to make gains for their members.

From the start, management's top priority was clear: Preserving the

Members of AFSCME Local 699 on the job, serving the people of Bloomington.

ability to temporarily transfer workers between the refuse and streets and sewers departments.

"Temporary transfers have been going on since I started working for the city 18 years ago," said local president Adam Smith. "But at a certain point, the city started abusing it."

Because management had been clear that these temporary transfers were their biggest priority, the union bargaining committee knew they could use it as leverage to secure a number of their own priorities, like raising wages and improving benefits.

But if the union was going to agree to continue allowing temporary transfers, then management would need to agree to put in more guardrails to prevent abuse of the process. The new contract does just that: Now, management must notify a union steward when they plan to transfer someone, indicating how many people they're transferring and for how long.

The final agreement raises wages by 10.25% across the board, makes major improvements to vacation accrual, increases the clothing allowance to $1,000 per year, and adds Juneteenth as a paid holiday.

"I'm very happy with it," Smith said. "Now there's going to be some accountability on management's part. At the end of the day, I think we made a lot of gains and didn't have to give up much."

The Local 699 bargaining committee included Smith, Jeremy Beutow, Todd Daniels, Ryan Johnson, Steve Kramer and Jacob Newberry-Lush. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler.

Facing tough economy, Freeport workers stand together to win

BEFORE THEY HIT THE BARgaining table, the nearly 80 members of Local 3367 were feeling what so many working people are feeling: That the cost of living is just getting higher and it's getting harder to make ends meet.

But union members knew by standing together in their fight for a new contract, they have the power to build a better future.

The union bargaining committee was fighting to hold the line on health insurance, to win more time off—and crucially, to win wage increases that would allow them to keep up.

Early on in negotiations, management ratcheted up tensions when they attempted to restrict 911 telecommunicators' lunch breaks with little notice and without bargaining with the union over it. Local 3367 immediately filed grievances and sent a notice to the employer demanding to bargain over the changes.

Members responded to that aggression by packing city council meetings holding signs declaring that "We Are Heroes Too" and passionately spoke out during open comment.

Members of the community they serve rallied to their side. They showed up to meetings and urged the city to immediately agree to a fair contract. Some urged union members to strike, vowing to stand with them in solidarity if it came to that.

The local ultimately won a new contract without having to go on strike, largely thanks to their willingness to speak out and the support they received from the community.

"We won the best pay scale raise for our local in its history," said local President Andrew Girscher. "Certain people saw an average between 6-12% right away, with backpay. Everyone else saw a 4% increase each year for the duration of the contract. I'm extremely proud of that."

But their new contract does more than just raise wages. They won expanded bereavement leave, more vacation and sick time, and made improvements to the grievance procedure that will benefit union members.

The bargaining committee included Girscher, Josh Oldenburg, Janet Weber, Kenneth Milliken and Janelle Folkers. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Rob Holt.

Members of AFSCME Local 3367 at the city of Freeport stood strong and won a contract that will help them keep up with the rising cost of living.

SHORT REPORTS

March 17 primary election coming up fast

IT'S AN ELECTION YEAR, AND the primary is practically upon us. Election Day is Tuesday, March 17. Early voting begins on Feb. 5 in most counties (Chicago early voting begins Feb. 12).

By voting together, AFSCME members can elect candidates who will stand up for public services and working families.

AFSCME members who serve on Area PEOPLE Committees have spent the last several months interviewing candidates and examining their voting records on the issues that matter most to union members.

As On the Move goes to print, several Area PEOPLE Committees have already made endorsements at the county level. Endorsements for state legislative candidates and congressional and judicial candidates will be finalized soon.

Check AFSCME31.org/Vote for the latest information, along with resources to make sure you're registered and help you make your plan to vote.

New SNAP requirements

NEW RULES PUT IN PLACE BY the Trump administration could end food assistance for as many as 400,000 Illinoisans.

For millions of Americans, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, is the difference between going hungry and having enough food for their families.

On Feb. 1, the Trump administration imposed new requirements, mandating that people receiving SNAP benefits work or volunteer for at least 80 hours per month.

But the new requirements ignore the fact that nearly half of SNAP recipients in Illinois already have a job—and for the other half, getting a job may not be an option. What's more, the new rules state that if a SNAP recipient loses their benefits, they can't apply again for three long years.

"SNAP is vital," said Cristal Terronez, a human services caseworker with the Illinois Department of Human Services and a member of AFSCME Local 2615. "In this economy with how prices are, a supplemental food program that already is supposed to just help a little bit goes a long way. People are living paycheck to paycheck."

Terronez helps people access SNAP in the Rock Island area. There's already so many barriers that prevent people from accessing the assistance they need, and she sees these new rules as an "added barrier" which will further discourage them.

Council 31 member is AFSCME International's "Never Quit" winner

AS THE CHILD OF IMMIgrant parents, Noemi Golden grew up with two languages: the one spoken at home—the language of her parents—and the one of the world outside.

Like many children who grow up bilingual, she didn't always appreciate it when her parents forced her to speak their language inside the house. But that was then. Today, she's grateful that her fluency in Spanish allows her to serve her community in more ways than one.

An RN for the Madison County Health Department, Golden works in the communicable diseases program.

AFSCME Local 799 member Noemi Golden is January's Never Quit winner.

She serves patients who come in for testing, exams and follow-up interviews, and she provides information and resources.

"I try to ease the anxiety and embarrassment that many people feel when they come in, especially for an STD," Golden says. "I like to tell them that it's okay, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Those who speak only Spanish are often grateful that I helped lessen their anxiety. They feel better just knowing there is someone who can translate for them."

Bobbie Tetidrick, a colleague of Golden's who is also a registered nurse, says she often relies on Golden to call her Spanish-speaking patients, and Golden always responds "without blinking an eye."

"Her heart is big and she loves her community, and she refuses to not stand up and help, even when she has 60 other things waiting on her."

For her service to her community, Golden—a member of AFSCME Local 799—is a winner of AFSCME International's Never Quit Service Award. The award recognizes public service workers who go above and beyond the call of duty to make their communities better.

"When families come in and they don't speak the language, you feel for them, because they're just as human as everyone else and they deserve to be treated the same as everyone," Golden says. "We don't know their story. The point is they're here and they need help. If we can give them the resources they need, that's what drives me. That's what makes me feel good: knowing I made a difference in their lives."

When the Illinois Department of Corrections abruptly switched its health care vendor to Centurion Health last year, AFSCME sprang into action and convened a bargaining committee to make sure that the rights, wages and benefits of union members who had worked for the previous vendor were protected. As *On the Move* went to print, the bargaining committee had just reached an agreement with the new vendor that does just that. More information in our next issue.

RETIREE NOTES

Social Security office visits to be cut by 50%

THOMAS WALSH, AN AFSCME retiree from Rockford, was trying to get his wife enrolled in Social Security and needed to schedule an appointment at his local office.

"The wait time to reach the Social Security Administration (SSA) was far too long," Walsh said. "I was on hold for a long time, and we had to wait a couple of weeks for an appointment. I feel lucky we were able to sit across from a helpful worker and get this important task done."

Just a year ago, Walsh could have walked into his local SSA office without an appointment. But recent changes implemented by the Trump administration are making Social Security even harder to navigate.

In 2025, SSA laid off more than 7,000 employees, leaving many offices short-staffed or closed altogether. Walk-ins were eliminated and all appointments now must be scheduled online or by phone.

Field offices—community-based branches that provide face-to-face assistance for retirement and disability benefits, Social Security cards, and other services—handled more than 31.6 million visits between October 2024 and September 2025.

Now, Trump's SSA commissioner, Frank Bisignano, has announced plans to cut in-person visits to field offices by half in 2026. This move will make it harder for retirees to apply for benefits or get help with Social Security and Medicare.

Jessica LaPointe, a union leader representing 30,000 Social Security workers through the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), stressed that field offices are vital for people without access to technology.

"They should be able to walk into an office to get help," she said, warning that SSA aims "to allow AI and the internet to replace a well-trained, well-vetted workforce."

Walsh is grateful for the service he received but worries about retirees with disabilities.

"It seems like this administration wants to make it harder and harder for seniors to get help with a program they rely on for their livelihood—and that's just wrong," he said.

Scams targeting seniors are on the rise

A NEW REPORT FROM THE Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found that consumers age 60 and older are disproportionately harmed by scams that use technology to drain retirement savings, pressure victims into quick decisions, and exploit fear or isolation. Older Americans lost billions of dollars to fraud in 2024.

AFSCME retirees must be diligent to protect themselves from these scams, which are increasing in number and sophistication.

Although older adults filed fewer complaints than younger people, their median losses were much higher—reflecting both larger financial assets and the devastating impact of a single scam.

Impostor scams topped the list, with criminals posing as government officials, bank representatives, businesses, or even family members. These schemes often use urgent messages about supposed legal trouble, frozen accounts, or overdue payments to push victims into sending money before verifying the claims.

Investment scams are also common, promising low-risk or guaranteed returns and often tied to trending topics like artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, or real estate. Victims have reported losing tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Payment methods play a critical role in fraud losses. Bank transfers, cryptocurrency, and gift cards are among the most common—and hardest to trace—ways scammers collect money. For example, if a "company" asks for payment in Target gift cards, it's a scam.

Consumers who believe they've been targeted or victimized should report it to the FTC, which uses the data to track trends, guide investigations, and warn the public. Reports can be filed on the FTC website or by calling the National Elder Fraud Hotline at 1-833-FRAUD-11.

"We must continue to educate ourselves and encourage seniors to report fraud," said AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees President Larry Brown. "If it happened to others, it can happen to you."

How a mail-fraud scam works

You may receive a letter with what looks like a certified check. The scam occurs when you deposit the check—it turns out to be fake, and you're still responsible for the money because you deposited it into your account.

How to Avoid Getting Scammed:
If you don't recognize the sender or have questions about a check, call the issuing bank to confirm it's valid.

RETIREES GIVE BACK

SUB-CHAPTER 55


SUB-CHAPTER 67

SUB-CHAPTER 77


SUB-CHAPTER 85


SUB-CHAPTER 88

This holiday season, many retiree sub-chapters gave back to their local food pantries, homeless shelters and after-school programs—making sure their communities had what they needed to get through the holidays.

ON THE JOB

Tyler Toussaint

BUILDING SERVICE WORKER

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY-EDWARDSVILLE

AFSCME Local 2887

What does a day look like for a building service worker?

A typical day is about resetting the spaces where students live, learn, and study so they walk into a clean, healthy environment. That includes restrooms, sinks, water fountains—every space students occupy. The goal is to remove distractions, clutter and anything that might make people feel uncomfortable or worried about getting sick.

The job also involves event setup and support. Building service workers handle operational needs during events, from student activities to sports events to catered functions. Many of the items used for these events are heavy, and workers carry and set them up by hand. Graduation is the biggest event of the year.

Why did you come to work as a building service worker at SIUE?

I was planning on transferring to SIUE to complete a degree. I ended up getting more involved with the labor movement, which is more fulfilling. It fulfills me to be involved with the local, the university and giving back to my university.

I feel that even if I'm just taking out the trash, or making sure an event runs smoothly, that people feel taken care of—that gives me pride. It feels like I'm not doing this for random people, I'm doing this for my community. That gives me meaning.

What's the best part about your job?

Another benefit is being able to leave work at work. There's no expectation to take projects home, answer calls at odd hours, or carry stress into personal time. The job allows me the space to live a full life outside of work.

There are also moments of connection—talking with students, teachers and staff. These interactions humanize the work and help people understand who is supporting them behind the scenes. Many people don't realize building service workers exist, so those small conversations matter.

But the best part is knowing the work gives something back.

What are some of the challenges you face on a daily basis?

Seasonal work is always a challenge. In the fall, we keep leaves out of buildings and clear entranceways. In winter, we constantly clean up snow salt that gets dragged inside. When staffing is short, winter becomes especially overwhelming.

Another major challenge is dealing with apathetic or dismissive management. Workers often feel seen as replaceable, which affects morale and mental health. There have been situations where management tried to replace full-time workers with student workers or temps, leaving our regular employees feeling displaced and undervalued. We've had to fight that.

How does your union help you succeed at work?

The union works to right wrongs, protect workers and stop management overreach. It's not just about enforcing policy, it's about preventing unfair practices, arbitrary decisions and unsafe conditions.

During negotiations, the union has fought against tying wages to student enrollment and against forcing workers to come in during dangerous weather without proper compensation. It protects members from unjust firings, false reports and inconsistent interpretations of rules.

Why are you active in your union?

My involvement in the union began almost by accident—meeting the union president in one of the buildings and clicking with him. From there, the work grew: taking notes during negotiations after COVID, helping build the union and eventually serving as chief steward and now interim vice president.

Being active in the union is about giving a voice to the voiceless, fighting for people and being part of something larger than yourself. Being a part of AFSCME gives me a sense of purpose on the local, state and national level. In difficult times, the union feels like a light in the dark, a way to push back rather than feel hopeless.

It also comes from a personal belief: you should leave things better than you found them.