

ON THE

MOVE

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State Parks: Brought to you by AFSCME members in IDNR

PAGE 4

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ISU WORKERS ON
STRIKE PAGE 3

TELECOMMUNICATOR
SAVES A LIFE PAGE 5

RESPONDING TO AI
THREATS PAGES 8-9

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

LET'S TAKE COURAGE—AND HEART!—FROM THE LOCAL 1110 MEMBERS AT ISU.

On strike—Lessons for us all

For three weeks and counting as *On the Move* went to press, more than 300 members of AFSCME Local 1110 at Illinois State University in Bloomington have been out on strike. They are building service, food service and grounds workers, many with years, even decades, of seniority at the university.

Like so many working people in our country today, they struggle to make ends meet on modest paychecks. So, undoubtedly, going out on strike was a real hardship for them.

They only took that drastic step after university management dragged out negotiations for months once their contract had expired and then refused to consider any retroactive pay as part of a settlement. Without such retroactivity, the employees would be nearly two years with no pay increase.

Even after a 97% strike authorization vote was taken in late March, the university remained adamant in its refusal to negotiate further. It was more than frustrating to encounter such outright hostility from a public sector entity, especially a university that is shaping the future of tens of thousands of young people.

Over the course of the strike, there were many more frustrations as it became increasingly clear that the university's intransigence was being driven by its top leadership—the president and vice-president.

These two individuals proved unrelentingly hostile to the workers who are the backbone of ISU. They also demonstrated a shocking disregard for the truth—continuously mischaracterizing the issues in the strike and greatly exaggerating the cost of the union's proposals, even when testifying before legislative committees.

Elected officials who tried to help resolve the strike were deeply disturbed by the pair's inexplicable resistance to the

workers' modest demands.

It's hard to even imagine why the leadership of a major university would be so determined to incite conflict and spread disinformation. We do know that both of these men are relatively new to their positions (hired over the past two years) and appear to share a hunger for power above all else.

I've personally dealt with many employers over the years and, with the exception of the notorious Bruce Rauner, I don't think I've ever seen any as vile as these two.

It's hard to speak of good news at such a deeply disturbing time. But, actually, there is some: While the university leadership demonstrated its contempt for its workers, students and their families have stood up by the thousands to support them and express appreciation for the work they do every day.

Students brought food and drink to the strikers. They joined in rallies and other demonstrations. They even staged their own walk-out in support of the strike. And along with their families and the local community, they gathered more than 6,000 signatures on petitions calling on the university to reach a fair settlement.

This statement from one student sums up what we heard from so many: "I really appreciate the workers who clean the floors and fix any issues. They deserve to be paid enough to support themselves for all the great work they do."

It was amazing to behold the breadth and depth of the support from students and their parents. I took special


note of it because I am always struck by how often those who benefit from the labor of public employees at all levels of government barely seem aware of that work. Roads that are plowed in snowstorms in the gloomy night so folks can get to work. Buses that pick kids up for school each morning and return them safely at day's end. Support provided to individuals so severely disabled that their families cannot keep them at home. Trash pick-ups with reliable regularity to keep neighborhoods clean. Thorough inspections to ensure restaurants' cleanliness. It's a list that could go on and on. All of it work that is seldom noted and even more rarely affirmed.

The ISU struggle is so important because Local 1110 members stood up for themselves, refusing to be cowed by the bullying of those at the top, who are themselves handsomely paid (nearly \$1 million in compensation just for the two of them).

But it's also important because it's a rare instance of workers clearly seeing how much they're appreciated and how much their work matters.

As another student put it: "They do everything for us and get the least in return. It's not fair."

No, it's not fair. But the selfish, mean-spirited guys running ISU are not our only barometers of what the university community considers fair. Fortunately, there are also the thousands of students and other folks, including many of our state's elected officials, who have stood up for the strikers in their fight.

So let's take courage—and heart!—from the Local 1110 members at ISU. In a very tough fight, they provide a powerful reminder that the work AFSCME members do every day is vitally important to the public good—and whether we get 'thank you's' on any given day, we are building a reservoir of goodwill that will be there when it's needed most. 



ON THE MOVE

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ISU employees strike for fair pay and respect

Members of AFSCME Local 1110 who work for Illinois State University have been on strike since April 8.

More than 300 AFSCME Local 1110 members clean campus buildings, maintain the grounds, serve food and play other critical roles at ISU.

They're fighting for fair pay and respect after nearly two years without a raise. But university President Aondover Tarhule, who makes \$450,000 a year, has stubbornly refused to agree to retroactive pay for the year they've gone without a contract.

stayed home to take care of the kids. She suddenly had to find a way to keep a roof over her kids' heads, so she took a job at ISU cleaning a residence hall—the same residence hall where her mother works.

But Salto still struggles to make ends meet.

"I'm on strike because I have kids and the pay is not enough," Salto said. "I just want to give my kids more."

The university's refusal



Members of AFSCME Local 1110 have been on the strike line since April 8.

Now, after devoting years of his life to defending this country, he finds himself on the picket line, fighting for dignity and respect for himself and his co-workers.

"What I did protects our rights to engage in this strike, to protect our freedom of speech," he said. "I did it so that we can enjoy the benefits of this great country."

The community is with them

ISU workers aren't alone in their fight—thousands of students, parents and faculty have made clear they know who keeps ISU running.

More than 6,000 supporters, mostly ISU students and their parents, have signed a petition supporting the workers.

"They do everything for us and get the least in return. It's not fair," wrote Martin, an ISU student.

Another student, Kylie, wrote, "I really appreciate the workers who clean the floors and fix any issues. They deserve to be paid enough to support themselves for all the great work they do."

On April 23, students staged a campus-wide walk-out in support of striking workers, calling on the administration to end the strike by agreeing to a fair contract.

The next day, members of Local 1110, accompanied by state Sen. Dave Koehler and Rep. Sharon Chung, delivered the petition signatures—which together ran to nearly 500 pages—to Tarhule.

"We are carrying the entire community with us in these forms and petitions," Koehler said. "We have thousands of students, families, alumni, faculty and staff (and) all of us are speaking in one voice that you, the workers, are appreciated."

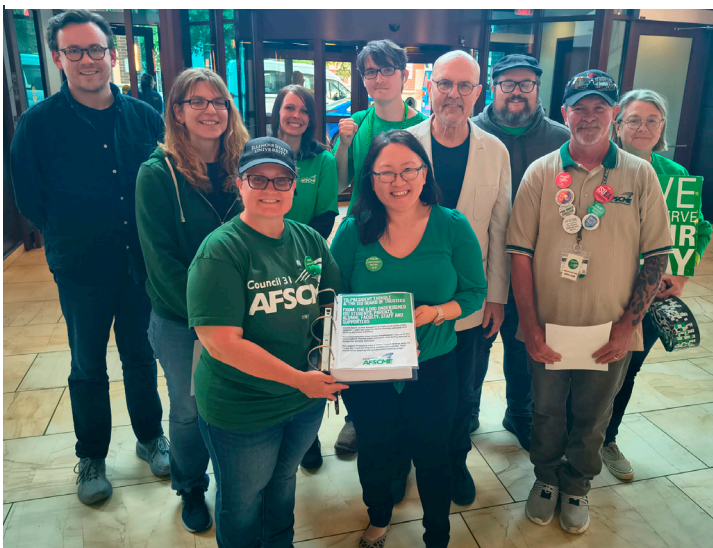
Workers will hold the line

As the strike continues, frustration with university leadership is growing. Trash is piling up, food service has been reduced, and parents are speaking out about worsening campus conditions.

Rather than bargain a fair deal, the administration brought in scabs to do the work performed by the strikers. Council 31 has filed a lawsuit against the university for violating the Employment of Strikebreakers Act.

The workers' fight is bigger than one campus. It is about whether the people who do the essential work get the dignity, respect and fair pay they deserve.

ISU workers are holding the line. Their unity is the clearest sign of all that real power on campus isn't in the president's office—it lives with the working people who keep ISU running every day.



State Rep. Sharon Chung (front row, right) and state Sen. Dave Koehler (middle row, center) accompanied striking workers to deliver 6,000 petition signatures to administration.

And the administration has gone so far as to try to strip out contract language that ensures union members get the same wage increases as other university employees.

"By refusing to respect our work, ISU administration forced us out on strike," said Chuck Carver, an ISU building service worker and the president of Local 1110. "By refusing to negotiate, they're prolonging the pain for us, for students and faculty and the whole Redbird community."

As of the time *On the Move* goes to print, ISU employees remain on strike and the university administration is still refusing to negotiate.

It's about dignity and respect

Many ISU workers start at just \$16.60 an hour; most make less than a living wage for a single adult in McLean County.

Building service worker Alexandra Salto has worked for ISU for almost six years. Her husband, the father of her two small daughters, died in 2020. Until that point, she had

to agree to basic fairness is a slap in the face to workers like building service worker Roy Spencer, who served two tours in the U.S. Navy as a nuclear engineer on an aircraft carrier.



The striking workers have received an overwhelming amount of support from students, their parents, members of the community and other AFSCME members.

Illinois' natural beauty: Brought to you by AFSCME members in IDNR

Last year, Illinois' state parks smashed attendance records. The state's dozens of state parks and historic areas saw 41 million visitors in 2025 and there's no sign things will slow down this year.

Behind those millions of visits, AFSCME members in the Illinois Department of Natural Resources work tirelessly to make sure these state treasures are in pristine condition.

Getting ready for the rush means spring is one of the busiest times for state park workers.

It's hard work, but they do it with pride—because there's no better payoff than seeing millions of people enjoying Illinois' natural beauty.

The spring rush in Randolph County

Matt Rudick, a member of AFSCME Local 1805 and a site technician at the Randolph County State Recreational Area knows the park like the back of his hand.

He lives just down the road, and he's had a strong bond with the park for most of his life. He grew up going there with his grandma and remembers fondly the relaxing summer days they spent

fishing there together.

"It's a great feeling to see families enjoying the park—it's part of why I came here to work," Rudick said. "It's the feeling you've done something positive for someone else."

DNR employees at Randolph County are never wanting for tasks to complete.

The winter months are all about preparing for the visitors that spring brings. Rudick and his colleagues repair their tools and equipment, rebuild park amenities like picnic benches and cut down dead trees.

The spring rains bring endless mowing that won't let up until the fall. There are urgent repairs to be done to the park's miles of hiking trails, electrical repairs to be done at campsites, native plant seeds to be planted, and so much more.

"Every day, we're doing something new to make the park better and safer for the people who are coming to visit it," Rudick said.



Photo credit: LaRita Nance

A waterfall at Dixon Springs State Park, where employees are represented by AFSCME Local 1048.

Making Sangchris Lake a destination

The 6,000-acre Sangchris Lake State Park sits just 20 minutes southeast of Springfield. The park is truly massive—and its size is only matched by its popularity.

The lake itself offers 120 miles of shoreline to fish and swim. Workers keep the lake stocked with bass, bluegill and catfish, making it a popular destination for anglers.

Illinois is also one of the best states in the country for deer hunting. The state's excellent conservation practices and copious food mean that deer are bigger and more abundant than in most other Midwest states.

"People come to our park from out of state to bag one of our big Illinois deer," said Tom McCloskey, a site technician and member of AFSCME Local 1019.

But bagging deer and catching fish aren't the only reasons people visit Sangchris Lake.

The park is home to two large campgrounds that bring families and nature enjoyers from all around. Both are completely full every single weekend.

The park's size and popularity means there's a lot to do in the spring.

The grasslands throughout the park all need controlled burns at regular intervals to promote the rejuvenation of native plants and trees. Each spring, they burn different areas of the park to let it grow back stronger.

McCloskey loves the outdoors, so this work is a perfect fit for him. But he also loves meeting the wide range of characters who come to enjoy Illinois' natural beauty from as far as Europe.

"We get everyone from country people to French airline pilots coming through the campground," he said. "It's great to see the wide variety of people coming to visit us."

The third generation keeps Dixon Springs going

Dixon Springs State Park is the state's southernmost park, sitting just a few miles from the Ohio River which marks Illinois' border with Kentucky. The park may not be the biggest, but it's beloved by its visitors.

Bennett Hughes, a DNR site technician and member of AFSCME Local 1048, is the third generation of his family to work at Dixon Springs. His grandfather and father both worked at the park, so it felt like a second home when he was growing up.

Even though the park is peaceful, work can still be stressful. It's one of the only parks with a swimming pool, which comes with a lot of extra maintenance. And the park's 800 acres would take one person a full week to mow.

"For as small as our park is, we have a lot going on," Hughes said.

The challenges are complicated by the fact that Dixon Springs is currently short-staffed, which means Hughes and his co-workers have to work even harder during the spring rush just to keep up with the myriad tasks.

All their hard work pays off in the end.

"Right now, I'm beat down and dead tired, but when I see the kids coming in and spending time in nature and enjoying it, that's the whole point of why we do it," Hughes said. "When you see the smiles on their faces, that makes it all worth it."



Members of AFSCME Local 1019 at Sangchris Lake State Park in their firefighting gear, performing a prescribed burn.

Quick-thinking 911 telecommunicator saves woman from house fire

January 30 was like any other day for Cierra Matthews—which is to say, a whirlwind of the unexpected.

Matthews is a 911 telecommunicator for the city of Freeport and a member of AFSCME Local 3367. Her family has a long and proud history in law enforcement, and her role as a telecommunicator continues the family tradition.

When she clocks in, she never knows what will come her way. The calls she receives on an average day range from the mundane (“I locked my



The blaze from which Matthews helped rescue a woman.

keys in my car”) to the deadly serious (“I’m trapped inside a burning house”).

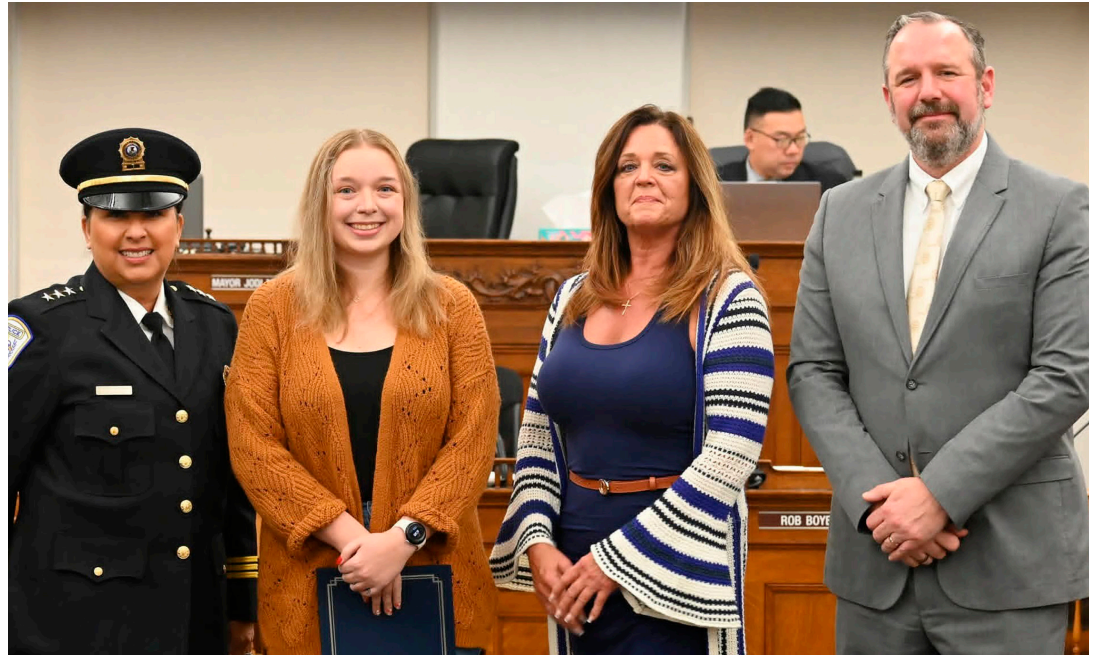
Jan. 30 was going to be the latter.

Late in the afternoon, one of her partners took a call regarding a house on fire. With more calls rolling in from neighbors, dispatchers quickly learned that not one but two adjacent houses were ablaze. Even so, no one had reason to believe anyone was in danger.

Then Matthews’ phone rang. “Ayúdame, ayúdame,” a voice said. It’s a woman pleading in Spanish: Help me.

“At that point, I locked in,” Matthews remembers. “I realized that this was life or death.”

Matthews immediately got a translator on the line and learned that the woman was on the second floor of one of the houses. She was panicking.



Matthews (second from left) receives a commendation from city leaders.

Matthews relied on her training. She urged the woman to calm down, wrap a shirt over her face to lessen smoke inhalation, and get low to the ground.

It had been only seconds since Matthews received the call, but already, time was running out. The first floor of the house was fully engulfed in flames; if the second floor was consumed, firefighters won’t be able to reach the woman until it’s too late.

Matthews knew the woman had only one way out: To survive, she had to jump from the second-floor window—and that’s what Matthews urged her to do.

The woman jumped. She landed between the two burning houses, injured but alive. Firefighters rushed in and pulled her to safety.

All told, the call lasted less than two minutes. A first

responder on the scene later told Matthews that if the caller hadn’t jumped, there was no way she would have survived.

For her lifesaving actions, Matthews was given a commendation by the city.

“It wasn’t just a voice on the phone. This was a woman. This was someone’s daughter, sister, possibly mother,” Matthews said. “It feels good, but I was just doing my job.”

American Library Association employees forming union with AFSCME

Joining the wave of union organizing among cultural workers, employees of the primarily Chicago-based American Library Association (ALA) announced they are forming their union with AFSCME Council 31.

When certified, the local union—American Library Association Workers United/AFSCME—will represent more than 100 ALA employees.

In an open letter, employees say they’re forming their union to “protect staff’s work, well-being, and ALA’s future.”

Citing recent layoffs, increased workloads, benefits reductions, financial crises, ingrained salary disparities, and lack of transparent decision-making, ALA workers are organizing for stronger

job security, stable benefits, better pay, more professional development opportunities and a voice in the policies that affect them.

“Experienced staff are the backbone of this association. A union helps protect the knowledge, continuity, and dedication that make our work possible,” said David Connolly, a member of the union organizing committee who has worked at ALA for 23 years.”

Colton Ursiny has worked in ALA’s continuing education division for 10 years. He



Employees of the American Library Association hold signs sharing why they’re voting yes for their union.

believes that having a union will help correct some troubling developments workers have recently seen.

“It’s incredibly unsustainable,” Ursiny told the *Chicago Reader*. “We are losing staff to retirement, to people burning out, to layoffs. It’s not a good situation here, and I think that a union will help protect

us. We need to foster a work culture, practices, pay, and benefits that encourage people to stay with ALA ... and to feel motivated to do the work that they need to do.”

The new union will be a welcome addition to the AFSCME family for the 35,000 AFSCME-represented library workers in Illinois and across

the nation. Founded in 1876, the American Library Association is the world’s oldest and largest member organization for libraries.

The organizing committee has filed for a union election with the National Labor Relations Board. They expect to have their union certified in May.

Our union contracts at work: Members win back pay, jobs back—and justice

State employee reinstated with one year of backpay

A VETERAN STATE employee grieved her firing and won a complete victory after an arbitrator ruled her termination was without just cause and ordered her fully reinstated with more than a year's worth of back pay.

The grievant, a long-time IT worker at a state facility and member of AFSCME Local 386, was fired for alleged insubordination. Management claimed the employee had improperly removed a coworker's computer access. The arbitrator later found that accusation to be "patently untrue."

The union presented evidence showing the grievant did exactly what her job required—following established security protocols when a coworker changed positions. No directive to do otherwise existed before she took action.

The arbitrator also found that management's belief the grievant was retaliating against the coworker—a charge they ultimately dropped—improperly colored the entire disciplinary process.

The grievance was sustained in full. The arbitrator ordered the employee to be reinstated with all seniority and benefits restored, and to receive full back pay.

Winning three years of bilingual pay

A COUNTY HEALTH CARE employee has won a complete victory after an arbitrator ruled she was entitled to bilingual pay going back three years—rejecting the county's effort to use its own administrative failures as a shield against paying what she was owed.

The grievant, a member of AFSCME Local 1178 who works at a primary care clinic, was laid off from a bilingual contact tracer position during the pandemic. She exercised her contractual rights to another position

and selected a vacancy that explicitly listed Spanish proficiency as required.

In her new position, she served as the first point of contact for patients, interpreting for Spanish speakers and providing essential daily customer service. Yet the county never paid her the \$100 monthly bilingual stipend guaranteed under her union contract.

When she noticed the missing pay just one month in, she began months of persistent follow-up with HR and management. For two years, the county strung her along—suggesting the matter was being worked on—and never once formally denied her claim. Then in June 2024, a manager finally put in writing that she had been placed in a "non-bilingual position." She immediately grieved that action.

The arbitrator found the county couldn't hide behind its own delays. Its vacancy list said Spanish was required. Its staff asked the grievant to confirm her bilingual skills before allowing her to select the position. A coworker in the identical situation had already been reclassified and

paid. The county's job codes, the arbitrator ruled, cannot override what actually happens on the job every single day.

The grievance was sustained in full. The arbitrator ordered the county to pay bilingual wages retroactive to 2022—a back-pay award spanning more than three years of work that the county benefited from while refusing to properly compensate the employee.

Fired on trumped up charges, library worker gets job back

WHEN MANAGEMENT alleged a 25-year library employee, broke attendance rules, they relied on exaggerated charges that an arbitrator ultimately found unconvincing.

Management said that the Local 1215 member's alleged failure to show up for work amounted to time theft and fraud, rather than simple attendance violations—a

charge the union contested.

Inexplicably, management also waited a full year to bring charges against the employee for attendance and work hours violations.

An arbitrator ultimately agreed with the union, determining that management did not have just cause to fire the employee—and finding that, because the charges were brought a year after the first allegation of an attendance violation, the charges were not timely.

The arbitrator ordered that the employee be given his job back.

City worker made whole after being charged with violating non-existent policy

AN AFSCME LOCAL 286 MEMBER who supervised the city's clean-up of derelict properties did his job in largely the same way he always had—but this time, management fired him.


The employee supervised

a crew that cleaned up vacant and neglected properties. At one abandoned house, workers hauled away enough trash to fill a quarter of a dump truck. Following a past practice and to prevent neighbors from dealing with the eyesore, deteriorating trash that was left on the back porch was placed inside the house, where the door was ajar.

The property owner received a bill from the city for the clean-up, which they disputed by saying the trash had been left in the house, not realizing how much trash the workers had actually hauled away.

The city fired the employee, alleging he defrauded the property owner. The union grieved the discharge arguing that the employee proceeded based on past practices.

An arbitrator agreed with the union, determining that the city had no basis for its claims that the employee had falsified the bill and that it could point to no policy that the employee violated.

The arbitrator ordered the city to reinstate the employee with back pay. 

LASALLE HEALTH DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES KEEP COMMUNITY SAFE AFTER RESTAURANT FIRE



Members of AFSCME Local 978 who work for the LaSalle County Health Department keep their community safe. In January, they responded to the aftermath of a restaurant fire, making sure that all contaminated food was disposed of properly and that it posed no risk to the public.

AFSCME MEMBERS SEE REAL RESULTS FROM MAIL-SCANNING PROGRAM

After years of staff exposures to dangerous drugs, change is finally coming to Illinois' prisons.

During the pandemic, drug smuggling and use in Illinois' prisons exploded, with dire consequences for both staff and individuals in custody. Union members pinpointed the incoming mail as the likely culprit for smuggling drugs into prisons.

After too many instances in which staff were overcome by drug fumes, AFSCME developed a plan for digital mail scanning and pressed the department to adopt it. During a statewide day of action in 2024, AFSCME members at prisons across the state held informational pickets with a united message: Our safety matters. They urged the

department to implement a program to scan mail.

AFSCME then signed an agreement with the department in May 2025 which laid out the process for establishing a digital mail-scanning system.

In September 2025, the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules approved the department's revised mail policy.

Now, the program has been up and running for six months, and AFSCME members in IDOC say it is working very well. While the union is still working to revamp the procedures that allow drugs to come in via legal mail, the changes members are seeing already are profound.



Will Lee
President, AFSCME Local 494
Pontiac Correctional Center

"The amount of fake addresses from fake senders, false attorneys' names, and the overall frequency of drugs coming in has slowed down.

"Members of AFSCME Local 494 feel like this is a huge win. We had to picket for it a couple years ago, and it feels good to see that effort come through and see legislators actually listen to what's going on in the facilities.

"Mail scanning is a leap in the right direction, and now it's up to DOC to address the technicalities and ground rules so every facility is following the same clear rules and practices, so that all staff and inmates know exactly what to do regarding the mail process."



Tenielle Fitzjarrald
President, AFSCME Local 3600
Lawrence Correctional Center

"Our members have seen a noticeable reduction in exposure to substances that were previously entering through traditional mail, and that change has had a real impact on day-to-day safety.

"Mail scanning is an important and necessary step forward. At the same time, it must be part of a broader, comprehensive approach to facility safety. While mail scanning has significantly reduced one of the most difficult avenues for detection and control, other pathways remain.

"Overall, the first months have demonstrated that mail scanning is an effective tool and a strong starting point."



D.J. Pedigo
President, AFSCME Local 3663
Big Muddy Correctional Center

"Before mail scanning, there was a lot of staff dealing with exposures. Since mail scanning, I don't think we've had a single exposure—it's drastically dropped.

"Morale has skyrocketed. Staff are happy to be coming to work once again. Morale even among the inmates has gone up, because some of them were tired of the exposures themselves.

"We fought the good fight, we got what we wanted, and now we're reaping the benefits."



Nick McLaughlin
President, AFSCME Local 2856
Graham Correctional Center

"Our members are ecstatic about mail scanning. It just cuts down on so many potential risks. Staff are out handing out mail, walking wings, and the offenders are not smoking nearly as much. The drugs are not

all the way gone yet, but it has really drastically slowed down.

"The mail room has really come together and put in a lot of long hours, making sure they're getting every inmate's mail to them and making sure Graham is safer for everyone. Our mail room staff is really phenomenal."



AI IN ILLINOIS:

What it is, where it is, who's behind it, and how we're responding

Since ChatGPT's launch in 2022, generative artificial intelligence has ballooned into an industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

AI's Big Tech backers tout the technology's promise of making work more efficient and easier.

But they also claim that by adopting AI, companies, government agencies, and organizations can cut millions of jobs.

That's why we need to fight back—to make sure that AI benefits workers and the members of the public we serve, while maintaining our jobs and the work we do.

What is generative artificial intelligence?

- Generative artificial intelligence is a type of technology that creates entirely new content, like text, images, video, and audio, in response to a user's input. Generative AI creates this new content through learning from vast amounts of training data.
- Many generative AI models—like ChatGPT, Claude, and Copilot—involve the use of chatbots, where a user prompts the technology to create an output. Agentic AI is a newer form of generative AI that allows the technology to autonomously make decisions on the user's behalf.
- Generative AI is marketed and sold both to individual users and to businesses, government agencies, and other organizations, to use on a high level to automate major operations.
- Generative AI has many risks and issues, including hallucinations (an example → at right), or the tendency for a system to create a false, nonsensical or misleading output that it presents as fact. Leading experts argue that hallucinations are impossible to avoid with generative AI.



How are we fighting to protect our work and our jobs?

AFSCME Council 31 is working to pass House Bill 4980, the Meaningful Human Control of Artificial Intelligence Act, during the current legislative session. This bill would:

- Require human control over any AI or automated decision-making system that affects public benefits, employment, civil liberties, safety, or legally protected rights of public employees;
- Require impact assessments every two years to make sure AI systems are not biased or inaccurate;
- Require negotiations with employee unions before procuring or deploying AI systems;
- Protect workers who refuse to follow incorrect or discriminatory AI outputs; and
- Ban AI use in hiring, firing, discipline, promotion, performance evaluation, or other employment conditions in the public sector.

Where have we encountered AI in our work so far?

State agency policies: Multiple State of Illinois departments have circulated policies outlining AI use by those departments and their employees. Among those, DHS has drafted a policy aimed at regulating when and how individual employees are permitted to use AI in their work, and DoIT's policy outlines the transparency and accountability that the AI systems must have when used within the department. AFSCME is continuing to monitor wherever similar policies are being introduced throughout state, county and local government, and to press for appropriate employee protections.

Cook County Public Defender's office: In December 2025, management invited investigators in the Cook County PD office to beta-test a new AI tool. Our union was never notified by management, but AFSCME Local 1767 acted quickly. The union immediately submitted an extensive information request; After a labor-management meeting, management agreed to notify the union and engage in impact bargaining should they decide to purchase or use AI tools.

Who is behind the AI "boom"?

The CEOs

These are a few of the billionaires pushing AI tech, no matter the risks or pitfalls for users or those impacted by AI decision-making.



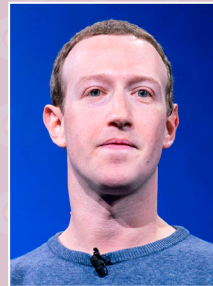
**OpenAI's
Sam Altman**
Net worth:
\$3.5 billion



**Anthropic's
Dario Amodei**
Net worth:
\$7 billion



**xAI's
Elon Musk**
Net worth:
\$823 billion



**Meta's
Mark Zuckerberg**
Net worth:
\$230 billion

The AI Lobby

The lobbying group TechNet, which represents Big Tech interests, is on the record opposing HB4980.

The super PAC Leading the Future spent millions of dollars in Illinois' primary elections supporting pro-AI candidates with mixed success. Leading the Future is backed by millions from Big Tech CEOs.

How we can protect our work at the bargaining table

- **Requiring Notice:** We can push for mandatory notification to the union whenever management is considering purchasing or creating AI programs.
- **Involvement:** We can make sure our unions have input in the process leading up to the procurement or creation of an AI system.
- **Stopping Surveillance & AI Evaluations:** AI is already being used to surveil and evaluate the performance of employees in some workplaces across the country. We can push for language to prevent this use of AI.

DSPs head to the Capitol for fair pay

Direct support professionals (DSPs) from AFSCME locals across the state converged on the Capitol on April 22 to lobby lawmakers for fair wages.

AFSCME DSPs have made real progress in leading the fight for higher pay in community disability agencies, more than doubling wages over the last 10 years.

But hourly pay is still less than 150% of the statewide minimum, the level that independent research group Guidehouse has recommended in order to maintain staffing levels.

DSP Danielle Towler is a member of AFSCME Local 2515 at Mosaic in Rockford. “This work deserves recognition, respect and fair compensation,” she said at a State Capitol news

conference. “DSPs should not have to choose between the work we love and our financial stability. I’m proud to be a DSP, but it is time for a change.”

This year, AFSCME is backing House Bill 4449, sponsored by Rep. Maurice West, and Senate Bill 2894, sponsored by Sen. Celina Villanueva, which would provide a DSP wage increase sufficient to comply with the Guidehouse recommendations.

AFSCME is also pressing for inclusion of a requirement that employers pass on 100% of the additional



More than 60 DSPs lobbied dozens of lawmakers for fair wages on April 22.

state funding to direct-care employees.

In the run-up to the lobby day, DSPs made hundreds of calls to lawmakers to urge support for the bills.

Those calls made a difference and laid the groundwork for Ashley Robinson, a member of AFSCME Local 3784 at Beverly Farm in Metro East, to testify in support of one of the AFSCME-backed bills before a House committee on April 16.

Robinson has five children and a brand-new grandson. For years, the only way she’s been able to make ends meet is by working extreme amounts of overtime—as much as 40 hours a week over and above her normal shifts.

After clocking out from a 16-hour shift, she heads home to make sure the kids have done their homework, breakfast is ready for the next morning and the house

is clean and tidy. After it’s all said and done, Robinson said she averages four hours of sleep.

“I don’t want to have to keep working 80 hours a week just to provide for my family,” Robinson told legislators. “Even though I truly love my job, I would also love to get more than four hours of sleep a night. I would love to have more time at home with my kids and to be a more present grandma to my grandbaby.”

Robinson’s story is alarmingly common among DSPs. Low wages mean that many rely on extreme amounts of overtime just to pay their bills.

The spring legislative session concludes at the end of May. 🦅



DSP Marlon Thomas (AFSCME Local 486) speaks at a press conference at the Capitol.

Upward Mobility Program enrollment booms

Program needs more resources to match demand

The Upward Mobility Program (UMP) is a popular, powerful program that helps state employees develop new skills and provides a path that allow them to earn promotions—but booming enrollment means that funding is being exhausted faster than ever before.

There are currently more than 7,400 state employees actively enrolled in the program, and more than 1,000 more in the process of entering.

UMP is a career mobility program established by the

AFSCME collective bargaining agreement for state employees. It gives all state employees covered by the master contract an opportunity to advance to more challenging, higher-paying positions through

individual career counseling, special testing opportunities, and tuition assistance to help earn college credits.

Before UMP was established, state employees lacked rights to jobs in other bargaining units, and state-funded education and career advancement services were scarce. Since its inception, UMP has helped more than 10,000 AFSCME members in state government expand their skills and earn promotions.

When UMP first started in 1999, the AFSCME collective bargaining agreement provided for an allocation of \$4 million

to the program. In 2012, funding increased to \$5 million. But funding hasn’t increased in 14 years, even as enrollment continues to boom.

Due to the combination of higher enrollment and lack of funding, the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) sent a letter to participants notifying them that tuition assistance funding had been exhausted for the fiscal year ending June 30, and employees who were counting on that assistance to start college courses will have to wait until funds are replenished.

There is some good news.

While the UMP division in CMS has been seriously understaffed for years—with just three case managers handling the thousands of enrollees—that’s about to change. CMS is in the process of training five new UMP employees, which will smooth out the process for all.

In 2027, AFSCME will begin bargaining the next contract for state employees. The union intends to push for increased funding to make sure UMP has the necessary resources to continue helping state employees make strides in their careers. 🦅

The long fight for pension fairness in Illinois

For far too long, Illinois politicians made a habit of treating public employee pensions as a budget line they could shortchange—deferring contributions, borrowing against the future, and hoping the next generation of lawmakers would deal with the mess. They never did.

Politicians kicked the pension can down the road for most of the 20th century, choosing to pay far less in pension contributions than was fiscally prudent. This led to billions in unfunded pension debt that the state should have been steadily paying for decades.

Rather than raising new revenue to pay for the pension liabilities that they had ignored, state politicians took a different, more destructive approach: They backed legislation to cut the pensions of every public employee—be it state workers, university employees, city or county employees, firefighters or teachers. That fight began in earnest in 2010 when corporate interests and a bipartisan group of legislators stepped up their crusade to push through the measure.

Lawmakers knew that cutting pensions would provoke outrage from

hundreds of thousands of public employees, so they focused their initial effort on a measure that only cut pensions for those hired after the effective date of the act, January 1, 2011. AFSCME and other unions vigorously opposed the measure, but it was difficult to mobilize strong resistance because no current union member of that time would be impacted.

Gov. Pat Quinn wasted no time in signing the bill into law. Thus Tier 2 was created.

Then in 2013, the politicians tried to cut pensions again. But this time, they had current employees who had years of public service in their sights.

AFSCME and our union partners in the We Are One Illinois coalition waged a vigorous campaign—including a highly impactful TV ad campaign—to block passage of



The fight for pension fairness began long before the 2024 rally at the Capitol.

the measure. But that effort was stymied by political leaders of both parties who were united in supporting the benefit cuts. And Gov. Quinn again signed the bill into law.

Labor unions argued that the law was blatantly in violation of the pension protection clause in the Illinois Constitution, which says that a pension “shall be an enforceable contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired.”

This means that the state is constitutionally barred from cutting pension benefits for current employees.

So once again, AFSCME and our allies in the We Are One Illinois coalition went into action. The coalition

filed a lawsuit to overturn the law, fighting all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court. And it was there that labor carried the day. In 2015 and 2016, the Supreme Court ruled that laws slashing the pensions of current employees were unconstitutional and, hence, null and void.


Even though cuts to Tier 1 benefits were overturned, the Tier 2 inadequacy has only grown as more and more “new” employees entered the public workforce.

Two years ago, the We Are One Illinois coalition reconvened with a goal of fixing the unfair Tier 2 pensions lawmakers had created a decade earlier.

AFSCME and the

coalition put the issue front and center, organizing town halls across the state to educate lawmakers and a large rally in the Capitol rotunda.

But that positive momentum hit a brick wall with the election of Donald Trump, who, along with Republicans in Congress, has pushed through hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts for public services, blowing a big hole in the state’s future budgets, making lawmakers wary of any new spending.

That may set labor back, but it won’t stop us. The We Are One Illinois coalition is continuing to fight for pension fairness, and has vowed to keep fighting for as long as it takes. 

AFSCME joins in lawsuits against federal cuts

AFSCME is fighting back in the courts against the Trump administration’s cuts to federal funding for public services in Illinois. These cuts target the workers who provide the services as well as the families who depend on them.

Through federal lawsuits, Council 31 is challenging efforts to strip hundreds of million dollars in public health grants and \$10 billion in child care funding.

Council 31 challenges public health cuts

Council 31 joined AFSCME International to file a federal lawsuit challenging the Trump administration’s directive

ordering the termination of hundreds of millions of dollars in critical public health grants administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The lawsuit seeks to block the administration’s effort to cut off funding to public health programs in Illinois, California, Colorado and Minnesota—all states being targeted because they are led by Democrats.

The loss of this funding threatens the work of public

health departments all across Illinois and some 800 jobs of public employees who carry out these programs.

“These lawfully appropriated federal funds support the jobs of countless AFSCME members whose work protects public health at the state and local levels,” said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “Their jobs and our communities should not suffer from illegal political retaliation.”

If they’re not reversed, these funding cuts will have immediate consequences not only for public health workers, but for the communities they serve.

State and local health departments rely on these federal grants to support disease monitoring, emergency preparedness and programs

designed to address ongoing public health challenges.

Local 370 member testifies against child care funding cuts

The Trump administration’s brazen attempt to withhold \$10 billion meant to help working families afford child care was blocked March 31 by a federal judge in response to a legal challenge by AFSCME International in which Council 31 is also a named plaintiff. The judge’s ruling allows the critical funding to continue to flow to affected states and families in need.

AFSCME Council 31 members submitted declarations the case, explaining how child care centers would shut down,

AFSCME members would be laid off and working parents would lose critical day care services if the funding was denied.

Courtney Benton, a member of AFSCME Local 370 who works for Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, is a public health care worker and mother of two. She told the court that without the federal subsidy, her son’s preschool would be too expensive, and she’d have to quit her job to stay home with him.

“I simply cannot afford both my mortgage and the full cost of preschool,” Benton said. “The child care subsidy that I receive has enabled me to have a career, to contribute to my community by caring for others, and to maintain a home for my children.”

The lawsuit is ongoing. 

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Local 370 wins new contract at SIU School of Medicine

WHEN AFSCME LOCAL 370 began bargaining for a new contract at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine (SIU-SOM) in April 2025, members were clear on their goals: better wages, plus longevity raises for the school's longest-tenured employees. And sure enough, after months of hard bargaining, members ratified a new contract that includes strong wage increases and a first-ever longevity system that rewards employees for their years of service.

Management initially refused to offer fair wages for members, insisting that, as health care workers, employee pay would be determined by a market analysis of titles—even if they'd worked at the school for a decade or more.

"We needed to show them that what makes the SIU-SOM work is not just the six-figure doctors—it's all of us," said AFSCME Local 370 President Gina Darden. "It's the nurses, the front desk workers, the call center workers. We had to make them understand that keeping this place running as well as it does takes all of us."

Members of Local 370 sprang into action to make sure management got that message. Dozens attended an SIU Board of Trustees meeting in June, where members spoke about the need for improved, livable wages.

But management still wasn't hearing it, so "we had to show we weren't willing to back down," Darden said.

The local organized a large rally and informational picket, where students and faculty joined the workers in calling out management's meager proposals.

Their dedication and determination worked. The picket sent the message they wanted to send. Within a matter of weeks, they reached an agreement on a new contract.

The new contract doubles the amount of money in members' pockets compared to management's initial proposal. Some members will see wage increases as high as 14%.



Members of AFSCME Local 370 walk a picket line for a fair contract.

They also won their first-ever paid parental leave policy, plus paid time off to vote.

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Whalen, the bargaining committee included Gina Darden, Terri Williams, Amanda French, Stacy Miller, Merrick Ermann-Schiave, Michelle Barnes and Rachael Stark.

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago workers ratify first union contract

EMPLOYEES OF THE MUSEUM of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago won major improvements to wages and retirement plans, their first-ever parental leave policy and more in their first union contract.

MCA employees first announced their intention to form a union with AFSCME Council 31 in February 2024. Management voluntarily recognized the union a month later. Contract negotiations began in September 2024 and resulted in a tentative agreement on March 18 this year. AFSCME-represented employees include 72 staff members across the museum's artistic and operations divisions.

The workers came out of their organizing phase strong

but knew they had to keep the momentum up.

"We had to keep pushing, keep leaning on each other for support," said Biz Knapp, a member of the bargaining committee and a sales supervisor at the museum.

They made sure their union was visible to management, planning t-shirt days every Tuesday for the duration of negotiations.

The four-year agreement raises wages by 12% across

the board, with a 3% increase retroactive to July 1, 2025. All bargaining-unit members will receive a ratification bonus and bilingual pay.

Union members also won four weeks of paid parental leave, an improved retirement plan, the maintenance of current health insurance cost-sharing ratios, and the establishment of a grievance and arbitration process that will ensure workplace issues are solved fairly and equitably.

Union members decisively approved the agreement on March 26 with 98% of votes cast in support of ratification.

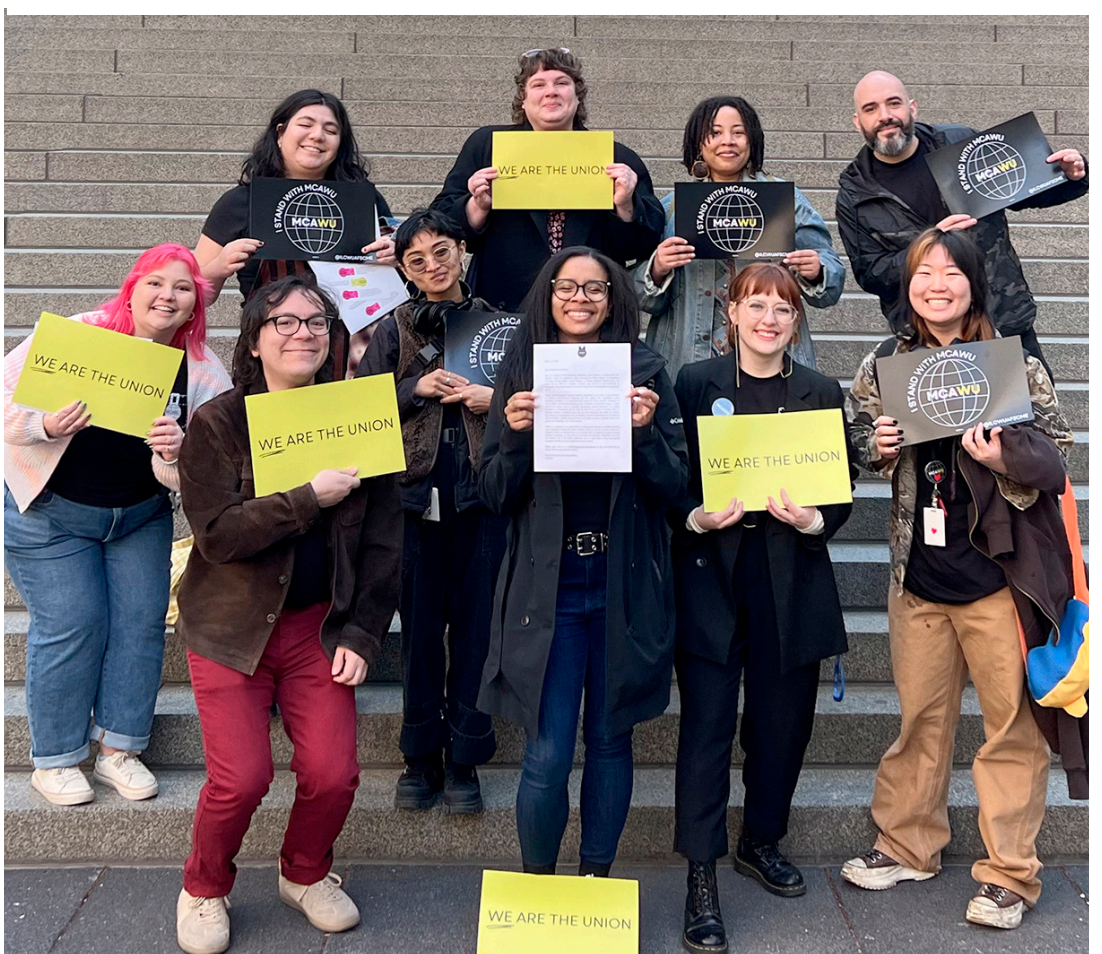
"We buckled down and didn't leave anything on the table," Knapp said. "We're really proud of the work we were able to do. The museum is abuzz with excitement right now."

The bargaining committee led by Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Lange included Knapp, Sylvia Schutes, Ralph Loza and Erica Erdman.

Beverly Farm workers all rise up

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 3784 at Beverly Farm, a private disability services provider in Metro East, are mostly direct support professionals (DSPs). But Local 3784 also represents maintenance and transportation workers, and the bargaining committee made it a goal to make sure everyone was treated equally.

"What we were fighting for is equality," said Local 3784 President Keisha



Museum of Contemporary Art employees won their first union contract by staying united.



The AFSCME Local 3784 bargaining committee after signing their new union contract.

Coleman. “Management was refusing to give the same wage increase to transportation and maintenance as they were to DSPs. We all work together to make this a great place—we deserve to be treated equally.”

They fought for their contract under the slogan “All of Us for All of Us,” a message designed to make clear to management that union members were united and wouldn’t let anyone be left behind.

Throughout their contract campaign, they wore stickers and put signs with that message in the windows of all their cars.

In addition to equal pay, they were fighting to relax management’s rules on overtime. Because the agency is so short-staffed, it’s not uncommon for workers to be mandated to work 16-hour shifts.

To make sure members have the best representation possible, the local also fought to expand union rights that management had previously resisted.

In the final contract ratified by members, they won every battle.

They stayed true to their “All Of Us for All Of Us” motto, winning the same wage increase for DSPs, maintenance and transportation workers, making sure no one was left behind.

They doubled the amount of time stewards are

allowed to investigate grievances, making sure that every member gets a fair shake.

And they significantly improved overtime language. Now, if an employee is mandated to work a 16-hour shift, they’re only required to work a minimum 12, with the option to share the last four hours with any worker who wants it.

“Solidarity and people coming together and standing

tall—it always sends a message,” Coleman said. “This employer has always tried to divide and separate us. But we came through this more united.”

Council 31 Staff Representative Lynn Fields led the bargaining committee that included Coleman, Ashley Robinson, Charlie Cox and Stanley Womack.

Centurion employees make the most of chaotic switch

IN 2025, IDOC MADE A shocking announcement: It was ending its contract with Wexford Health Services—the vendor that for more than a decade provided health care in Illinois prisons—and transitioning to an unfamiliar new vendor, Centurion.

Left wondering what was next were nearly 1,000 AFSCME members who, as Wexford employees, provided health care to individuals in custody at every state prison.

“It was a big shock. People were worried,” said Susie Doyle, a 20-year nurse at Western Correctional Center. “We were all wondering what was going to happen and what this new company would be like to work for.”

Fortunately, from the outset, IDOC made clear to Centurion that it would be required to abide by the union contract that AFSCME had negotiated with Wexford, so employees’ jobs were protected and their rights respected during the transition.

But there were still crucial topics that needed to be


addressed with the company, so AFSCME convened a bargaining committee which then set to work.

One of the biggest early obstacles was Centurion’s scant experience working with a union. They tried to make unilateral changes to job descriptions and working conditions without bargaining.

The committee made clear to the new employer that in Illinois prisons, workers have a strong voice through AFSCME.

The final three-year contract ratified by members raises wages by 10.5 to 12%. They won longevity steps to ensure more senior employees can still gain ground, and made it easier for employees to use time off.

“I feel like this is the best contract we’ve ever had,” Doyle said. “I feel like we got the most we could get, and in the long run, people are going to see that the benefits we’re getting are the best we’ve ever had.”

The bargaining committee included dozens of Centurion employees from correctional facilities across the state and was led by Council 31 Staff Representatives Patricia Rensing and Ty Petersen. 



The Centurion bargaining committee had representatives from dozens of Illinois prisons.

SHORT REPORTS

Workers Memorial Day: Continuing the fight for safer working conditions

EVERY APRIL 28, WE COMMEMORATE Workers Memorial Day, a day of remembrance for workers who are killed or injured on the job.

April 28 is chosen because it's the anniversary of the day the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) was signed into law in 1970.

Each year on Workers Memorial Day, the AFL-CIO releases a report called "Death on the Job", which compiles statistics of workplace fatalities and injuries.

The report finds that in 2024—the most recent year for which data is available—5,070 workers died in workplace accidents and

another 135,000 died from occupational diseases. That's 380 worker deaths every day. Illinois saw 156 workplace deaths in 2024.

From corrections workers to highway maintainers, AFSCME members face danger on the job every day.


After decades of improvements to workplace safety, making progress is now more challenging than ever. Corporate power has eroded worker protections for years, but under the Trump administration, corporations and billionaires are aggressively accelerating efforts to dismantle hard-won progress and the democratic institutions that uphold it.

Workers Memorial Day is a day to remember that one death on the job is still too many, and no one should have to worry whether they will make it home from work alive.

But it's also a day

to remember that safe workplaces didn't get that way because of

management—they got safer because unions advocate for them, and because of policy

choices that put workers first. 

CHICAGO EMPLOYEES FIGHT FOR SAFETY, STAFFING AND MORE



Local leaders representing the six City of Chicago AFSCME locals met with the city for a labor-management meeting on April 29 to defend their members' rights on the job.

They pressed management for answers on crucial safety issues, problems with the grievance procedure, and demanded action on recruitment and retention issues as some departments deal with poor staffing levels.

In this SERS election A UNION VOICE MATTERS

AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 recommends JOHN TILDEN for re-election

John Tilden is an experienced SERS trustee with some 50 years of public service. Before retiring, he was a proud, decades-long AFSCME member. John has served 10 years on the SERS Board of Trustees and is running for re-election to make sure SERS continues to serve the best interest of the annuitants who depend on it.

- ✓ Experienced Advocate
- ✓ Responsive to Annuitants
- ✓ Union Strong



Voting ballots from SERS will arrive in the mail the first week of May. Watch for your ballot, mark your vote for JOHN TILDEN and return it right away. Ballots must be received by June 1 for your vote to count.

RETIREE NOTES

Trump admin brings AI to Medicare

JAN LEASE, AN AFSCME Chapter 31 retiree and Medicare beneficiary, is one of many seniors concerned about a new pilot project from President Trump's Center for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). Called the WISeR Model, it allows Artificial Intelligence (AI) to determine whether beneficiaries qualify for certain outpatient procedures.

"I just do not trust a computer to determine whether or not I can get a procedure," Lease said.

WISeR began in January of this year in six states including Arizona, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Jersey, Texas, and Washington. Expected to impact around 6.4 million Americans, it marks the first time that prior authorization will be incorporated into Medicare.

Seniors aren't the only ones concerned. Many health care experts believe it will harm patient care rather than improve it. Others worry that the AI bot could make mistakes when deciding on who gets what care.

"While I know it is not currently impacting those of us in Illinois, they could expand it, and we need to fight back now before that happens," Lease said.

AFSCME is urging retirees to help fight back by calling their member of Congress and asking them to support the following bills:

- Ban AI Denials in Medicare Act (H.R. 6361), which amends the Social Security Act to prohibit CMS from implementing the WISeR model or any substantially similar models in the future that uses prior authorization in traditional Medicare (including AI).

- Seniors Deserve SMARTER Care Act (H.R. 5940/S.3480), which aims to repeal and prohibit the CMS WISeR model.

Champaign retiree launches hygiene pantry

AFSCME RETIREES
Sub-Chapter 88 member Della



Della Jacobs (at left), a member of AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 88 in Champaign, helped organize a hygiene pantry for community members in need with the support of her sub-chapter.

Jacobs knew there was a need in her community for free hygiene products, especially feminine products.

Jacobs was specifically looking out for people impacted by "period poverty", the lack of access to and inability to pay for menstrual products. With the support of her community and sub-chapter, she launched the CLUW Hygiene Pantry of Champaign County in partnership with the East-Central Illinois Chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, of which Jacobs is president.

"As a former SNAP-Ed person, I've spent a lot of time in all the pantries," Jacobs said. "Everyone had a little something, but it was not consistent. I wanted a place where people could depend on period products."

What started as an idea solely for period poverty quickly morphed into any item that relates to caring for your body.

Located at the Brookens Administrative Center in Urbana, the hygiene pantry provides free items such as tampons, pads, shampoo, conditioner and deodorant without any eligibility requirements.

The pantry has received community support. Members of AFSCME Sub-chapter 88

made a large donation at their annual Christmas party last year.

"I love working with people in my community and making their day," Jacobs said. "They are so happy they have a resource to go to, and it is rewarding to see their thanks and smiles."

For her service to the community, Jacobs was given the Governor's Volunteer Service Award, which she will accept in Springfield.

Fraud Alert: SERS retirees must use caution

A NEW SCAM TARGETS SERS retirees via text and email, and the retirement system is urging retirees to use extreme caution when disclosing personal information online.

The fraudulent text messages and emails promise monthly benefit payments up to four days early if a retiree completes a form providing personal data, including bank account information.

At first glance, the emails may appear legitimate. They contain the SERS logo and branding.

But the nonexistent "program" is a scam. SERS does not offer a program that allows early monthly benefit payments.

One easy way to spot the scam: Check the email address.

All legitimate emails coming from SERS will end with "@srs.illinois.gov". Any email purporting to come from SERS that does not have that ending should be considered fraudulent.

One of the trademark tells of the scam is that the emails may come from DocuSign, a legitimate service for gathering electronic signatures. However,

SERS does not use DocuSign for any direct deposit changes nor does it accept electronic signatures.

If you receive a text or email that you believe to be a scam, do not provide any of your personal information. Instead, contact SERS immediately at 217-785-7444.

If you have already provided your personal or financial information in response to what you believe was a scam, you should contact your financial institution immediately and notify SERS at the same number. 🐦

WARNING!

All legitimate emails coming from SERS will end with @srs.illinois.gov

If you receive a text or email that you believe to be a scam, do not provide any personal information.

Instead, contact SERS immediately at 217-785-7444



Tara Kerns

FORENSIC SCIENTIST III
ILLINOIS STATE POLICE

AFSCME Local 1964

Tell us about your work.

I've been with the state police for 25 years. My specialty is toxicology. Most of my work involves testing blood and urine for alcohol; the majority of my cases are driving under the influence, and some involve sexual assault. My time is split pretty evenly. It's about 50 percent in the lab and 50 percent on the computer. In the lab I run experiments on the samples, operate the instruments and handle evidence. Then I analyze the results and draw my conclusions.

Sometimes when a case goes to trial, we testify in court. I've testified over 30 times in my career.

Why did you become a forensic scientist?

I've always been a science and math nerd. I took every biology and chemistry class I could in high school, earned my chemistry degree from SIU Carbondale, and when I was ready to apply with the state, forensics was a natural match. It's not

easy to break into—there are a lot of applicants and not many people get hired.

Once you are hired, you go through an extensive training period. Mine was 15 months, learning instrumentation, theory, and how to interpret results. Toxicology was the discipline I wanted from the start because I love chemistry. That's the one I went after, and that's the one I got.

How do you make a difference in your work?

I love knowing I'm helping solve crimes—prosecuting the guilty and exonerating the innocent.

For most of my cases I never find out the outcome, but there are cases involving attempted murder or criminal sexual assault where I genuinely feel a sense of accomplishment.

I'm glad I have the skills to testify and speak up for people who can't speak for themselves. You're not going to get the appreciation from

management, but at least I get appreciation from the victims or the people that need our assistance.

What are some of the challenges you face on the job?

The biggest frustration is management not listening to the people actually doing the work, and the red tape we have to jump through to get the equipment and advancements we should have. Just recently, our janitor retired and our lab hasn't been cleaned properly since. We deal with biohazards, so that's a serious safety concern we're actively fighting to resolve.

How does your union help you succeed at work?

I grew up in a union household. My dad is a plumber-pipefitter, so I've always known the union is an asset. When I got this job, I wanted to get involved right away. I've been a steward for a long time and have served as VP and secretary on the local executive board.

My father taught me that with a union, when situations come up, you have people to rely on. The union helps us fight for what we need to do our jobs safely. Getting the lab cleaned, having our lab coats laundered, being provided with proper safety equipment—that's all part of our contract.

The contract also establishes a clear timeline of promotions and steps from trainee all the way up, which provides real security. Knowing the union has my back means I can focus on my cases and not worry about what might come up.

How does your union help you live your life outside of work?

Knowing that our union contract affords us the sick time to take my daughter to the doctor and paid time off to go on vacations just means that we have real security.