



ON THE

MOVE

UNITY CARRIES THE DAY!

A Fair Contract for State Employees

PAGES 8 & 9



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

FAIRNESS IS THE BEDROCK ON WHICH OUR DEMOCRACY RESTS.

Our time is now

Respect and fairness—that's as basic as it gets. And that's what it's all about.

For more than two years now, workers of every kind from one end of the country to the other have been standing up and standing together—refusing to back down—to demand the respect they deserve for the jobs they perform and the fair treatment they need to ensure a decent standard of living for themselves and their families.

It's about the UAW members in the Quad Cities, who walked off the John Deere assembly line in 2021 demanding an end to their two-tier wage structure—and stayed out for over a month until real progress was made in tackling that injustice.

It's about the flight attendants and airline pilots at just about every major airline in the country—all of them union members—who have taken to the picket lines and stood prepared to strike to ensure that the hefty profits the companies are making—over \$1 billion for United last year—are shared with the workers who keep those planes flying.

It's about the thousands of Starbucks workers who have stood firm as the supposedly “progressive” coffee company fires those who are trying to organize a union.

It's about the more than 300,000 UPS drivers who are holding strike practice drills as I write to make clear they are prepared to shut the company down if a new contract is not reached.

It's about some 200,000 actors and screenwriters who are out on strike right now while studio moguls who earn hundreds of millions annually gloat about how they will hold out until workers can no longer pay their rents or mortgages.

And it's about us, AFSCME members in Illinois.

All of the testimony at public hearings, picketing and sheer grit that it took the Peoria Public Library employees to win the best contract they've ever had.

All of the Whiteside County public health workers

fighting for a first contract, going up against an administration that shows them nothing but hostility.

All of the Rockford school bus drivers who went all out to defeat the school board members who had been totally disrespecting them and just won a new contract with the new board that raises their wages by as much as 20%.

All of the protests, the signs and stickers, the pledge cards, the fierce determination that it took to reach a contract settlement for tens of thousands of state of Illinois employees just this month.

The good news here is that hundreds of thousands of workers—from graduate students to home care workers to museum employees—are coming together to form unions to insist that their voices be heard—and their concerns addressed.

And more good news: Millions of workers who already have union representation—from correctional officers to firefighters to steelworkers to nurses—are becoming ever more determined to make the fight for what they deserve.

The pandemic years placed enormous demands on so many frontline workers—especially those in the public sector—who continued showing up to do their jobs despite the risks involved. And in the wake of the pandemic, we've seen a radical shift in workforce metrics—with worker shortages in almost every sector, most especially again in the public sector. Such shortages place immense pressure on the remaining workers who

must work large amounts of overtime and cope with ever-larger workloads.

While these workers were often hailed as heroes in the heat of the COVID moment, we have learned that this designation meant little in real terms to the wealthy and powerful who spent those high-risk days safely ensconced on their super yachts.

(No surprise, the sales of super yachts—and mansions!—are soaring.)

For the uber-rich the pandemic only meant opportunities to further consolidate their riches without regard for the rest of the country. It meant gleefully amassing ever more wealth, untroubled by the growing inequality in our country.

In fact, since 2020 when the pandemic was at its height, the top 1% got 64% of the newly created wealth in our country.

Put another way, during the pandemic the collective wealth of 657 billionaires grew by 44.6%—a “pay increase” that no ordinary worker could ever dream of.

So, yes, we are standing up—and we'll keep on standing. We know that the jobs we do are vital, that the work is often difficult and demanding, that we—all working people—do make this country happen every single day. And we are deserving of respect for all that we do.

We know that fairness is the bedrock upon which our democracy rests. Our country cannot thrive and prosper if wealth is concentrated in the hands of a tiny slice of the population. We deserve a fair share.

The unity of vision and purpose that sustained us in our fight for a new state contract—and for contracts with other employers all across Illinois—will continue to propel us forward to ensure that every member—and every working person in our country—has the respect and fair treatment that is rightfully theirs. 

Council 31
AFSCME
We Make Illinois Happen

ON THE MOVE

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Museum of Science and Industry workers join AFSCME

Chicago-area cultural organizing streak continues

Workers at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) officially formed their union, Museum of Science and Industry Workers United, with AFSCME Council 31, via a union election held in mid-June.

"Today, we savor the moment and celebrate our historic achievement. Tomorrow, we get back to work at making the Museum of Science and Industry better for all," the organizing committee wrote in announcing their victory to their colleagues.

Opened in 1933, the Museum of Science and Industry is one of the largest science museums in the world. Each year, museum staff welcome more than 1 million visitors to view its hundreds of exhibits.

The MSI workers join those from other Chicago-area cultural institutions like the Art Institute, the Field Museum, the Newberry Library and the Peggy Notabaert Nature Museum in forming unions with AFSCME.

MSI workers had to contend with an aggressive anti-union campaign from management, in which the museum bosses brought in a high-priced law firm known

for its cutthroat efforts. Workers on the union organizing committee describe frequent visits from the CEO and upper management while they were doing their jobs and late-night emails which sought to divide the museum staff.

"I had upper management coming by my desk multiple times a day," said Margy LaFreniere, an education project manager at the museum and a member of the union organizing committee. "One day I counted they came by five times, just to talk about random things. I got the impression they just wanted me to know they were watching me."

Ultimately, the workers overcame management's anti-union campaign. The 140 employees in the museum's guest experience, guest operations and education departments won their union election with a 75% yes vote.

"When we found out about the kind of money the



Members of MSI Workers United call on the museum to cease its anti-union campaign at an April action.

museum paid [the anti-union law firm], we thought about how that effort was made rather than doing something positive that could contribute to the museum," said KJ Jamerson, a museum facilitator and member of the organizing committee.

"We formed our union to have our voices heard louder. That's the main thing we didn't feel like we were getting," Jamerson said. "We didn't have a seat at the table, we aren't always being heard when we

voice our concerns. Now our union will help us uplift our voice."

Now MSIWU members will do the important work of electing a bargaining committee to negotiate a first contract. Members say fair wage increases are at the top of their list of bargaining priorities, but other issues have drawn their attention, too.

For instance, in the museum's coal mine exhibit, which takes guests inside a true-to-life mine and showcases the

processes and dangers of mining coal, safety is an issue for some tour guides.

"We do the best we can to stay safe. But the safety protocols and the chains of command—when, say there is an accident and we need to get in touch with human resources—are lacking," Jamerson said. "We'd like to address that."

Along the same lines, workers who are members of the LGBTQ+ community have recently faced harassment from guests. Clear procedures are needed to dictate how the museum must respond when something like that occurs.

The museum has also been critically short-staffed, a byproduct of what workers say is management's eagerness to cut costs by paying people less.

"We're losing talent in a way that isn't helpful for the organization," LaFreniere said. "There are people who, if pay was commensurate with their talent and skills, they would want to work here. But it doesn't seem to be a priority for management."

Another key area of worker dissatisfaction is the opaque process for finding advancement opportunities. They hope to spell out a process through which employees can advance their careers with the museum.

"Every time I walk into the building, I feel this weight over me knowing that there are people who we all work alongside of who get paid very poorly," LaFreniere said. "We are going to fight for a contract to make sure that people who are contributing to what is an amazing gem in the city are treated fairly." 

WORKSHOPS • STRATEGY • POLICY • HONORING COMMITMENT



23RD BIENNIAL
AFSCME COUNCIL 31
CONVENTION
OCTOBER 19-21

AFSCME local unions across Illinois have begun preparations for Council 31's 23rd Biennial Convention, scheduled for October 19-21 in Springfield.

Delegates to the convention elected by members of their local unions will vote on resolutions that will set policy and guide strategy for the coming two years. They will also hear from guest speakers like International AFSCME President Lee Saunders and have the opportunity to attend a wide range of informative workshops.

As at past conventions, this gathering will honor members who show outstanding dedication to their work and their union. The **PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD** is for individuals who exemplify the very best in public service, going the extra mile day in and day out. The **JANE FITZGERALD-GLORIA ARSENAU AWARD** is for the local union activist who demonstrates dedication, spirit, farsightedness and energy in working to build a strong local union. Any AFSCME member can nominate a fellow member for either of the biennial awards.

Visit AFSCME31.org/Award to submit a nomination for the Public Service Award or the Jane Fitzgerald-Gloria Arsenau Award!

AFSCME members support military training operations

Local 2794 members at Marseilles Training Center make sure soldiers feel at home

It's no small task to maintain 2,500 acres of land, a grenade range, a tear gas training chamber, simulated urban combat environments, an obstacle course and more.

But for employees of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs at the Marseilles Training Center, it's all in a day's work.

On any given weekend, 2,000 soldiers could be at the center. Those soldiers need places to sleep, eat, shower and most importantly to train. The facility's 16 members of

during the Iraq War, the Marseilles Training Center is where he came to get all his certifications before mobilizing.

The facility is home to a plethora of training areas, each presenting unique situations that prepare soldiers for whatever gets thrown at them. The massive shooting range is hundreds of meters long, with elec-

“Being all veterans, we know what they need and what they want before they even have to say it.”

AFSCME Local 2794 are the primary team making sure that it meets military standards.

The group can get anything done. Air conditioning is broken? They'll fix it. Fresh ropes need to be hung on the obstacle course? They can handle it. The state-of-the-art automatic targets on the firing range got damaged? They'll have them back up and running in no time.

They're plumbers, carpenters, electricians, heavy equipment operators and landscapers all in one tight-knit team. They need to be, since the variety and scope of maintenance required calls for jacks of all trades to stay on top of it all.

Dan Jackson, a military maintenance engineer and the president of AFSCME Local 2794, says that all the AFSCME members at the site take special pride in their work because they know it's all in service of those who serve their country.

“These military folks shouldn't have to worry about if the lights are going to come on or if the toilets are going to flush. When you're deployed, you have enough of that,” Jackson said. “You shouldn't have to go through that when you're on your home turf. For everything these soldiers do for us, making sure the facilities are nice and comfortable is the least we can do for them.”

The grounds are used by the National Guard, the U.S. Army and police tactical squads from across the state. When Jackson was in the Army

tronic self-healing targets that pop up at different distances, testing soldiers' accuracy and reflexes. In order to carry a military-issue rifle as a member of the Illinois National Guard, this is where you come to prove you're capable.

The four square-mile area is owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and leased to the National Guard. As such, there are intense environmental considerations that must be dealt with. It's up to Tom Morgan, a military environment specialist, to make sure that the military activities on the grounds live up to the U.S. Department of Defense's standards of environmental stewardship.

“It's my job to make sure invasive species are under control, perform prescribed burns on the prairie and try to mitigate insects that do damage to the environment,” Morgan said. “We try to maintain the training lands for military readiness, but in a way that minimizes the impact to the environment.”

Andy Johnston is a building maintenance worker at the center and an active National Guard member. He first joined the team two years ago after Jackson asked one of the National Guardsmen to borrow a pair of hands on a job. That pair of hands happened to be Andy's, so when he went above and beyond, Jackson encouraged him to apply for an open position with the state if one came up.

The majority of the team of AFSCME members are



Andy Johnston repairs a target at the facility's shooting range.



Members of Local 2794 measure a length of rope to be installed on the obstacle course.

former—or in Johnston's case, active—military. They all know the acronym-laden lingo that can sound like gibberish to civilians.

“Being all veterans, we all speak the same language,” Johnston said. “We know

what the soldiers who come here to train need and what they want before they even have to say it.”

Steve Lolling, a military maintenance engineer and Air Force veteran, said the needs of the soldiers are more

palpable to the members of Local 2794, having themselves gone through the same things.

“We care more than anyone else would, because even though you may be out of the service, you're always a soldier,” he said. 

Head Start worker regains job through grievance process

Union process protects against wrongful termination

Malisa Reed likes her job at Head Start in Centralia because she likes helping people. As a family service worker, she connects Head Start families with other services like GED programs, gas assistance or rides to the doctor.

When a family needed car seats, she called every service in the area until she found one that could give them a seat at no cost.

But Reed's job was office-based. She had no teaching certificate or classroom experience of any kind. So when she was told that she had to help out in the classrooms because of short-staffing, she thought it might turn out to be just a couple shifts here and there.

She went along, willing to help out where she could. But soon she realized she was in the classroom more frequently than she was in the office doing her actual job.

Plus, Reed—a member of AFSCME Local 2338, which represents more than 100 Head Start teachers and support workers in southern Illinois—had recently undergone back surgery. The after-effects of that surgery were still lingering, and the classroom was

starting to take its toll on her physical health.

"Little kids yank, they pull, they shove," Reed said. "I started having some of the same symptoms I had prior to the surgery. I was getting migraines and my legs were getting numb."

"If you're willing to stand up for yourself and others, you can make a difference."

When she sent an email to her supervisor saying she was "respectfully declining being assigned into classrooms" due to her deteriorating health conditions, she was told that she had to submit a doctor's note.

So that's what she set out to do. She submitted a sick time request to attend her doctor's appointment, which management acknowledged. But they never signed the form.

Meanwhile, management kept moving the goal posts. Now they wanted Reed to find someone to cover her shift in the classroom or she would be terminated. It was never her responsibility to find someone to cover her shift—something that had never been asked of her any of the other times she had taken off—and no policy or provision in her union contract requiring her to find her own replacement.

Still, Reed tried to comply with management's request. When she was unable to find a replacement, she notified them.

The combination of these circumstances led management to fire Reed, citing alleged insubordination for her refusal to find a replacement and for attending her doctor's appointment when she believed her time off request was approved.

When Ed LaPorte, Reed's AFSCME staff representative, scheduled a pre-disciplinary meeting, the union came to realize that a decision had already been made by management about Reed's employment well before the meeting.

That's when the union filed a grievance that ultimately went to arbitration.

When the decision came down, Council 31 legal counsel Scott Miller "emailed me with the subject line 'WE WON!,'" Reed said. "I read the arbitrator's report and I just started

replacement and to get medical documentation to her manager within a reasonable time frame, there was insufficient cause for any discipline," the arbitrator wrote.

Reed was fully reinstated to her former position with 14 months of back pay. Her first



AFSCME Local 2338 member Malisa Reed's first day back on the job was June 17.

crying. Finally, someone heard my side and realized I was right. They realized I was being unfairly punished."

In light of "the clear fact that [Reed] made every reasonable effort to find a

day back on the job was June 17.

"I believe that there's power in the people," Reed said. "If you're willing to stand up for yourself and others, you can make a difference." 🦋

PEOPLE program delivers for AFSCME members

PEOPLE—Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality—is how our union makes its voice heard in the political and legislative arena. As a union of public service workers, it's critical that we are heard on the public policy issues that affect our jobs.

That voice is achieved through the PEOPLE program. Throughout the years, PEOPLE has helped us protect AFSCME members' jobs, beat back privatization efforts, halted attacks on our rights and benefits, and supported candidates who stand up for working families across Illinois.

Through the power of our PEOPLE program, we've won gains in every sector where

AFSCME members work. PEOPLE's winning record is long, but it needs a big team to keep winning.

Here are just a few examples of the progress PEOPLE has enabled:

State employees

- **Fight to protect and improve public pensions.** As a result of intensive lobbying and education by

AFSCME and other public sector unions, lawmakers are beginning to acknowledge the inequities and inadequacies of the tier two pension benefits.

IDOC employees

- **Prioritizing safety.** When there was an increase in assaults on staff by individuals in custody, AFSCME sparked legislative hearings to shine a bright light on the problem of violence in state prisons.

DCFS employees

- **Improving Safety for DCFS Employees.** In the wake of the brutal murders of DCFS investigators Pamela Knight in 2018 and Deidre Silas in 2022, AFSCME helped pass



legislation to increase worker safety, including giving DCFS investigators the right to carry personal protection such as Mace or pepper spray, and requiring DCFS to provide the equipment and necessary training.

Local government

- **Protecting your jobs against privatization.** We have fought countless measures that have been introduced by local elected officials to sell off important public resources—and eliminate public sector jobs.

Higher education

- **Higher education funding increases.** Correcting the state of Illinois' notable disinvestment in public universities, the FY24 state budget

boosted higher education funding by 7%—the largest percentage increase in two decades.

Direct Support Personnel

- We took the lead, in coalition with employers and families, to raise the wages of front-line workers in nonprofit disability agencies supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. With PEOPLE power at our backs, we won a combined total of \$5.00 per hour for DSPs in just the last three years alone. 🦋

Sign your PEOPLE card today!

Ask your local union leaders how to become a member.

Remembering Chris James

Committed union leader dies in workplace accident



Christopher James, a corrections maintenance craftsman at East Moline Correctional Center, died in a tragic workplace accident on May 23. He was 48 years old.

James was an executive board member and the treasurer of AFSCME Local 46. More recently, he was one of his local union's representatives on the State of Illinois Bargaining Committee. On the day of his death, James was due to be present at bargaining, but cancelled his trip at the last minute to tend to an urgent maintenance project at the prison.

James and his colleagues were told to perform tree-trimming maintenance. During this task, James fell more than 60 feet from a boom lift. The circumstances that led to his death are now under investigation by the Department of Corrections and the Department of Labor.

A committed union leader and family man

Heartbroken at the loss of their colleague, members of the Bargaining Committee penned a condolence letter to his wife, Sam, and sons Hunter and Chase.

"To us, Chris was a friend and colleague who radiated warmth, who could find humor in almost any situation, who never hesitated to speak truth to power, and who leapt into action whenever one of his friends or colleagues needed an advocate to fight for them," the letter reads.

"He adored his family and would do anything for them," said Local 46 President Cody Dornes. "They always came first for him."

The Bargaining Committee collected donations totaling \$5,000 for James' family. AFSCME members from across the state—some who knew him well, some who had never met him—attended his funeral.

James' friends remembered him as riotously funny and good humored, but when it came to fighting for the members of Local 46, he took it seriously. He diligently tracked how much overtime people worked, making sure that certain employees weren't being passed over for overtime opportunities. He was steadfast as his local's treasurer and carefully tracked its finances.

"He had a good way of communicating with management and supervisors. He was able to defuse situations and calm everybody down," Dornes said. "People respected him and

"He was everybody's friend"

Dornes and James were friends for more than 12 years. They started working the second shift at East Moline at the same time, and a friendship and union partnership began to blossom almost instantly.

Denise Chandler, an account tech at East Moline, also started at the facility then. They were such good friends that James called her his "work wife"—a title that miraculously did not land him in the doghouse with his actual wife (a close friend to Denise).

Chandler has a tattoo on her ankle of the initials "CJ"—which are, coincidentally, the initials of her two daughters. The coincidence was not lost on James, who loved to joke with new employees at the prison by telling them that he and Chandler were married.

"Don't believe me? Go ask her to show you her tattoo," he would tell them.

"He was a hard worker, but he was also a jokester. He brought a smile to everyone's face," Chandler said. "He was everybody's friend."

He also loved to prank call his coworkers while they were off the clock. You could always tell it was him, though, because he wasn't able to disguise his trademark laugh as well as he thought he could.

Seeking accountability

State Rep. Gregg Johnson, who was friends with James as the former president of Local 46 before his election to the Illinois General Assembly, spoke on the House floor about the circumstances that led to James' death. "There's [going to be] a lot of questions," Johnson said. "[...] I can tell you this: there's going to be accountability. I don't want to hear any more about how [the Department of Corrections] values their employees when they try to save money."

The questions refer to the inadequacy of the equipment he used and the safety training that maintenance craftsmen undergo before performing dangerous tasks.

"I hope this tragedy doesn't go to waste," Dornes said. "I hope it changes how we view safety, how we view protocol. I hope nobody else has to go through this again." 



James and his colleagues walk the picket line with UAW members in 2021.

his opinions. He was blunt. You knew he was never going to give you any nonsense."

He was equally as skilled at his job as a maintenance craftsman as he was dedicated to his union duties. If a vehicle had a tricky mechanical problem that vexed everyone else, Chris was able to get it running in no time.

HELP WANTED!

Spread the Word: Public Service Matters!

In the wake of the COVID pandemic, the ranks of public service workers of every type have dwindled. AFSCME members like us know how important the work is that we do. And we know how important it is to have adequate staffing levels to be able to fulfill our mission.

Over the next several issues, *On the Move* will be featuring employees from a wide variety of occupations in the public sector with a message about why their job matters. While *On the Move's* readers likely already have jobs in the public sector, we're hoping to encourage you to spread the word to your friends and family: There are union job openings all across Illinois with fair pay and good benefits serving the public good.



Gina Darden

Medical Insurance Associate, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Local 370

There are currently more than 120 clinical and administrative vacancies at the SIU School of Medicine.

"It is a good place to work. We have longevity, we have union representation that other institutions don't have. The benefits are great, the hours are great. We always have set hours so we can see our families, and we have overtime available to us."



Will Lee

Corrections Lieutenant, Pontiac Correctional Center

Local 494

The Illinois Department of Corrections as a whole has thousands of vacancies, but Pontiac Correctional Center has been particularly hard hit. The facility is nearly 50% below its normal staffing levels.

"It's a great union job. We work for the state but serve the public. There are plenty of opportunities to promote within. You can support your family and afford to live. It's rewarding, and it's easy to take pride in what we do because we do a job that not many other people want to do. You have rights as a union employee, like benefits and vacation time, and the contract is being improved all the time."



Lisa Egan

Clerk V, Stroger Cook County Hospital

Local 1111

Across the entire Cook County Health system, there are nearly 2,000 vacant positions.

"I get to help people. We show them respect. It's a really good feeling to be able to help somebody. Also, it's a cultural thing. We have patients from all over the world come to Cook County and therefore dealing with a huge range of diversity. You get to learn and there is never a dull moment."



Adam Kohl

Principal Juvenile Counselor, Lake County Juvenile Detention Center

Local 3182

The Lake County Juvenile Detention Center is currently 15% below its standard staffing levels.

"The work is rewarding. You have a chance to potentially change a kid's mindset going from criminal thinking to maybe realizing there is more out there in life. Watching them right their ships is the rewarding part. I hope that when I sit down to have a group conversation with the kids, you hope one of the kids will hear what we say, and a light bulb will go off."



Crosby Smith

Mental Health Technician II, Ludeman Developmental Center

Local 2645

The Illinois Department of Human Services has nearly 2,000 vacant positions.

"You are coming into an environment where you have individuals with severe disabilities who can't care for themselves and their family can't care for them either. It is a rewarding experience to be able to come into a situation where you are very much needed and fill a void in someone's life. Personally, the highlight for me is working with these individuals. We have a great benefits package thanks to the union, of course. And we're continually building up the pay over time."



Marci Malnar

Public Service Administrator, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Local 1048

As of June, there were 840 vacant positions in DCFS, ranging from investigators to administrative support roles.

"It gives you a chance to advocate for children. They don't have lobbyists. You have a real chance to make an impact on a child's life. We have a wonderful salary, we have the best benefits and we have a retirement system so not only do you get a good salary while you're working, you'll have a good salary for the rest of your life. Having the backing of the union will make sure that we continue to have those good benefits and good pay."

Is your workplace facing serious staff shortages?

Let *On the Move* know about the problem and why people should come to work there.

Email the information to webaction@afscme31.org

WE DID IT!



Unity Day



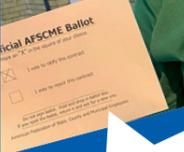
Back Your Bargaining Committee Day



Bargaining Committee Send-off



Ratification



NEW STATE CONTRACT: *RESPECT & FAIRNESS!*



After hundreds of workplace actions and countless displays of solidarity big and small by AFSCME members all across state government, the AFSCME Bargaining Committee and the State of Illinois reached a tentative agreement at 1:30 a.m. on July 1. The new contract covers more than 30,000 state workers.

“We’ve built our union strong,” said Roberta Lynch, Council 31 Executive Director and chief negotiator for the Bargaining Committee. “We know that standing together and acting together in unity will carry us forward and make our working lives better in so many ways. It is that commitment and unity that has brought us to this moment—a new collective bargaining agreement that makes significant progress on so many fronts.”

Over the course of nearly six months, AFSCME members in every state agency stood up to demand fairness and show management that they would back their Bargaining Committee every step of the way.

In the weeks leading up to the contract’s scheduled expiration on June 30, more than 14,000 members signed cards pledging to take whatever action was needed to win a fair contract agreement. The bargaining committee piled those cards into 20 clear plastic storage bins and delivered them to management as a show of solidarity.

Bargaining committee member Mickey Lomeli of AFSCME Local 1753 (Joliet Treatment Center employees) said that delivering the pledge cards helped pave the way to the agreement.

“Seeing management’s reaction to all those bins, it was beautiful. You could see that it caught them off guard,” Lomeli said. “We told them that those cards are a symbol of all of our members and their commitment to winning a fair contract. That’s when things started to change.”

The new four-year contract was ratified by a 99% vote. It includes pay increases totaling 17.95% over the four-year term of the contract, as well as a \$1,200 stipend to each bargaining unit member to be paid upon ratification of the contract. The Bargaining Committee was also able to secure paygrade increases for 37 titles covering thousands of employees.

Longevity pay will go up \$30 per month, effective Jan. 1, 2024. The shift differential will increase to \$1.50 an hour on the same date and to \$1.75 an hour a year later.

The contract also makes clear that remote work wasn’t just a temporary pandemic measure; it’s here to stay,

based on the operational needs of the agency. This provision ensures that employees currently eligible for remote work will remain so and opens the door to expansion for additional employees.

“A lot of our members were worried that the hybrid or remote system would go away,” said Brittany Adams, a human services casework manager and one of the Bargaining Committee representatives from Local 2858. “People are very excited that it’s not going away. We’ve shown that we can work remotely and still be very productive and now we can continue doing so.”

Under the new contract, state employees are now eligible for 12 weeks of parental leave for both birthing and non-birthing parents.

“There are so many things that are so beneficial, especially for young members that want to start families,” said Valarie Medley, a public health program specialist and Bargaining Committee representative from AFSCME Local 805. “If you’re a young employee wanting to have kids, now you can have those 12 weeks of leave.”

One of the Bargaining Committee’s most fiercely fought battles was to contain health insurance costs. The employer sought large increases in premiums and out-of-pocket maximums that would have forced virtually every employee to pay thousands of dollars more over the term of the agreement.

“We all feared what would happen if management had their way on health care costs,” said Heather Heelan, a correctional officer at Sheridan Correctional Center and a member of the Bargaining Committee from Local 472. “We were all very happy with the final outcome. The health care costs increases are very modest.”

In the end, the Bargaining Committee succeeded in keeping health insurance affordable. The final contract makes certain that there will be no increase in annual out-of-pocket maximums for the term of the agreement, and no health care cost increases at all in the first year of the contract. Employee premium contributions will increase by \$10 per month in the second year of the contract, and by \$8 per month in the third and fourth years.

“The camaraderie, bringing all these people together all these who have different beliefs, backgrounds and feelings about our jobs, [is how] we got it done,” Medley said. “We worked together as a union to get a contract that would help everyone. And we’re all very proud of that.” 

WIU members embraced by community in contract fight



Members of AFSCME Local 417 at Macomb's Heritage Day Parade in June.

The more than 150 Western Illinois University building service workers (BSWs) and clerical workers of AFSCME Local 417 knew that bringing the broader community into their fight for a fair contract was key to putting pressure on management.

This year's theme of Macomb's annual Heritage Day Parade—"Saluting Higher Education"—

gave them the perfect opportunity to make their fight for fairness visible. So they

constructed their own float and marched with a clear message: We make Western Illinois University work and deserve a fair contract.

"It was great. We had very good response from the people in the crowd," said Dan Shipman, the president of Local 417 and a BSW of 12 years. "There were a lot of people rooting us on, a lot of good applause."

The encouragement they received from the crowd—people who are their friends, family and neighbors—gave them the fuel to keep up their fight.

"People in the crowd were telling us, 'Keep fighting, keep going,'" said Zoey McPeak, a BSW and member of the bargaining committee. "We also had such a positive response from members of other unions who were there showing their support for us."

Atop the list of priorities for the Local 417 bargaining committee is correcting a two-tier pay system for BSWs. The system makes it impossible for new hires to reach "legacy" status and creates pay discrepancies to the tune of \$8 per hour, depending on when a BSW was hired.

But the union's economic demands have been met with resistance from management, who are crying poor. To union members, it looks like a matter of misplaced priorities.

"They say there's no money, but they're hiring new vice presidents and directors," Shipman said. "There's money for things like that. Those people are making six figures. One of their paychecks would cover four of our people. I'm doing

three peoples' jobs and they're telling us to do more with less."

Another priority for the Local 417 bargaining committee is removing the requirement that university workers must pay to park. The permits cost more than \$100 a year.

"Half the time, there aren't even spots to park in because there's construction going on and students are parking in our spots," McPeak said. "Forcing us to pay for something like that just isn't reasonable."

They also paid close attention to negotiations for a new master contract for state of Illinois employees. Because that agreement's health insurance and family leave policies also apply to university employees, they sent solidarity at every step of the way. Health insurance turned out to be one of the most fiercely fought battles in bargaining with the state.

"We're giving our members a voice," McPeak said. "Every meeting we have, we have new concerns, whether it's safety concerns or something unfair that we're trying to address. Everything we do gives our members a voice and we take that with us straight into negotiations." 



AFTER THE STORMS, AFSCME IS THERE

After storms tore through southern Illinois and left thousands without power, members of AFSCME Local 3417 in Springfield Public Works worked day and night to clear debris in their community so utility workers could begin the process of restoring power.

Meet AFSCME's Larry Marquardt Scholarship winners

Each year, AFSCME Council 31 selects several children of AFSCME members to be awarded the Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

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

This year, scholarships have been awarded to three students who will travel different paths during their college careers but doubtless make great contributions to their respective universities and fields of study.

Each applicant is asked to write an essay on why the labor movement is still relevant and needed more than ever today. You'll find an excerpt from each winner's essay below their brief bio.

Dominick Helman

Dominick Helman is the son of Jennifer Helman, a human services casework manager in AFSCME Local 1048. He's studying agricultural engineering at Murray State University. He became interested in all things agriculture through his years growing up on the southern Illinois farm that has been in his family for almost 200 years.

After graduating, he hopes to work for a large agriculture equipment manufacturer, repairing broken machinery.

"JOINING TOGETHER IN unions enables workers to negotiate for higher wages and benefits and to improve conditions in the workplace," Dominick wrote.

"Union members know that by speaking up together you can accomplish more than you could on your own."

"We must continue the labor movement so that all are protected, and no loopholes emerge for taking advantage of American workers."

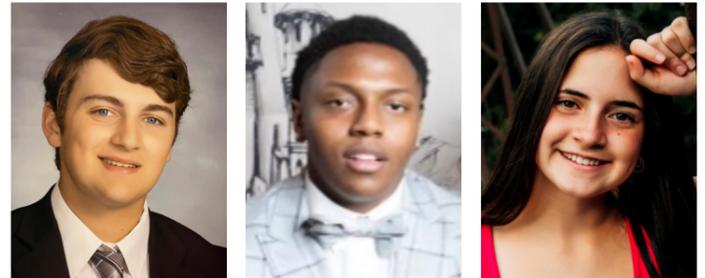
Terrell James

Terrell James is the son of Stacy Gunter, a member of AFSCME Local 2794 who works for the Illinois State Police. This fall, he plans on attending Indiana State University where he'll take pre-med courses with a minor in business.

He was the captain of his basketball team in high school, and he hopes to continue his basketball career as a walk-on at Indiana State.

"I FEEL LIKE WE NEED THE union so much because a message is sent that fairness can be brought to the workforce," Terrell said.

"One of the most important issues facing workers today is the rise of the gig economy, which has



Dominick Helman, Terrell James and Tessa Ashley, 2023 winners of the Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

led to a significant increase in precarious work arrangements. [...] Labor unions can help protect the rights of these workers by advocating for fair labor standards and protections."

Tessa Ashley

Readers may recognize Tessa Ashley from the last *On The Move*, in which Executive Director Roberta Lynch ceded part of her column to Ashley's essay.

Ashley is the daughter of Leslie Ashley-McLean, a member of AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University. Ashley has chosen elementary education as her major at

Illinois State University, and she hopes to become a teacher after she graduates in 2027.

"WHEN I FINISH MY DEGREE and I am looking for employment, I will only take a job where I have a union to support me. I know teaching is hard work that I will love, but I also know that I need a union for better working conditions and for help negotiating a good wage," Ashley wrote.

"It seems public education is under attack right now and a union will help ensure that educators are treated with the respect they deserve while providing one of the most important services in our lives."

"What AFSCME has meant to my family"

Justis Walker—the son of Rosalynn Walker, a child welfare specialist in the Department of Children and Family Services and member of AFSCME Local 2081—has been awarded the 2023 AFSCME International Family Scholarship.

Each year the AFSCME Family Scholarship Program provides ten \$2,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors that will be renewed for \$2,000 each year for a maximum of four years, provided the student remains enrolled in a full-time course of study. The scholarship may be used for any field of study.

Justis is a graduate of Lane Technical High School in Chicago, and this fall he plans to attend the University of Iowa, where he will double major in computer science and computer engineering.

The following is the essay he submitted with his scholarship application.

Editor's Note: The essay has been edited slightly for length.

MY MOM STARTED HER JOB while she was pregnant with me. Unsure of her rights as a pregnant woman, she unsuccessfully tried to hide her pregnancy for the first couple weeks of work. After I was born, I am told, my mom would attend union meetings with me in my stroller. Since my mom has such a demanding job, she would sometimes sneak into the office on weekends. She would type case notes while I bounced in a baby bouncer.

My earliest memory of the union is when I would accompany my mom to rallies. I really



Justis Walker

did not know who these people were, what the signs they held said or what they were yelling about.

I remember being frustrated with a union meeting that, in my opinion, was taking too long, so I crawled under a table in protest. So up until that point, that's what I thought union members did. They had a bunch of long meetings, traveled a lot and held up signs, yelling about stuff.

I never realized how much the union would come to both of our defense one day.

When I was eight, I suddenly became very sick. I used to have stomachaches every

other day. I would break out in hives all over my body, including my face and feet. Walking up stairs was so painful that my mom had to carry me. Carrying an eight-year-old up two flights of stairs every time we left the house was no easy task.

The doctors were unable to diagnose me for five months. I had five exploratory surgeries in seven weeks. So, for months, my mom would work her very stressful job and then come home to take care of her sick child at night. My illness caused my mother to call off of work a lot. Eventually my mom took a leave of absence.

Well, some people at my mom's job did not believe that I was really sick. So, after nine years of taking care of other people's children, my mother's job refused to allow her to take care of her own child.

The doctors finally figured out what I had. I was diagnosed with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis and Hyper IGE Syndrome. I was scheduled to start infusion treatments the following Wednesday after being diagnosed. I was finally going to get some relief.

But my mom's job fired her the Monday before the treatments were supposed to start. They didn't care that my mom was on an FMLA-approved leave of absence. They fired her anyway. They cut off her health

insurance on the day she got fired instead of allowing the insurance to cover through the end of the month. Considering my treatments cost \$60,000 each, the hospital refused to do the treatments without insurance.

That's when those people with the long meetings, who traveled a lot and held up signs stepped in.

The union stepped up to help. There were phone calls, cards, letters, some even stopped by the house. AFSCME filed a complaint with the Department of Labor and she got her job back within two months.

That same day my mom got her job back, she was accused of neglecting me. My mom was indicted for child neglect in an investigation that was clearly retaliatory for her complaint. So, a year later, she was fired from her job again. My mom sued and was able to get the indictment overturned, but by this time, our house was in foreclosure. The union then advocated not just for my mom to get her job back, but to get it back with the full one-year salary that she missed.

I am forever grateful for the loyalty and support the union showed to my mom. When my mom needed them the most, AFSCME was there. The union made a difference.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Members of the Local 1275 bargaining committee.

Local 1275 brings politics into play

FOR YEARS, THE SCHOOL BUS drivers of AFSCME Local 1275 had their demands for fairness blockaded by the Rockford Board of Education, which was, at best, dismissive of their concerns. At worst, the board was openly hostile to their needs.

"Truthfully, morale was down," said Catina Barnett, Local 1275's president. "We felt used. We're the ones the students see first and last, but the district didn't see it like that. They looked at us as an interchangeable part, not an insight into the children's needs."

The employees decided they wouldn't take it anymore. Before the April municipal elections, the local union put together a plan to elect school board members who were sympathetic to the problems they were facing. They interviewed prospective candidates and made recommendations through the Council 31 PEOPLE program.

Every Saturday for two-and-a-half months leading up to the election, union members would grill out at the Rockford Labor Temple before hitting the streets to educate voters on their preferred school board candidates.

When all was said and done, every single one of the candidates recommended by the union won their elections. Shortly after the new board took office, the union began negotiating a contract

extension aimed at fixing the problems that plagued their members under the former board.

Barb Hengels has been a school bus driver since she moved to Rockford to care for her aging parents seven years ago. During that time, she's had to work three jobs just to make ends meet. Her workday started on her bus at 5:30 a.m. Between her morning and afternoon bus routes, she'd take a shift at her second job. And her workday would end at 10 p.m. after she had finished her third job of the day.

"Now, my one job is enough. I don't have to do that anymore. I can actually sleep at night," Hengels said.

Hengels was a member of the bargaining committee. Everyone on the committee was close to one another, but Hengels was particularly close to one member of the committee: her daughter, Elizabeth Peck.

Peck became a school bus driver at the urging of her mother, who sits on the local union executive board, and followed in her footsteps by running for secretary shortly after she became a member.

"Me and my mom talk a lot. We were able to bounce

ideas off each other," Peck said. "We could shoot each other a look in bargaining and could communicate with each other just through that look."

In the final contract that was overwhelmingly ratified by the members of Local 1275, they won a 26% increase to the starting wage for new drivers, and that new increase scales up fairly depending on how much experience a new hire has.

Wage increases for current employees will rise 18–25% depending on the step. Critically, the new extension freezes health insurance premiums; before, wage increases were often swallowed up by health insurance cost hikes. Also, if a member accrues more than 15 sick days, they may use them during winter and spring breaks to help ease the burden of not being paid during those times.

"At the end of the day, without unions we have nothing," Barnett said. "When everybody works together, you get what you deserve."

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dornier and included Barnett, Hengels, Peck, Leah Robinson, Nicole Allen, Linda Ace, Kristy Lee and Sue Miller.

Extension for Cook County members

MEMBERS OF THE 13 AFSCME local unions in Cook County government won a one-year contract extension with significant wage increases and enhanced parental leave.

Most notably, the extension provides members a 3.5% wage increase that is retroactive to Dec. 1, 2021, and a 5% wage increase for all members effective June 1, 2025.

"This is a big win for everyone," said Phil Cisneros, the president of AFSCME Local 3969, which represents workers in the Office of the Public Guardian, among others. "Usually there is a give-and-take in contract negotiations. But there was no negative to this extension. There's nothing not to like."

The extension was negotiated by the bargaining committee in just one afternoon, a stark contrast from the marathon bargaining sessions that run late into the night in typical negotiations with Cook County.

"Normally, we don't even get through everyone's names in the first bargaining session," Cisneros said.



An AFSCME member in Cook County votes to ratify the new contract extension.



Waukegan Public Library workers voted to ratify their first contract, which immediately boosts pay across the board by 7%.

Under the extension, all full-time county employees are now eligible for 12 weeks of paid parental leave. This leave is extended to non-birthing biological parents, surrogate parents and those fostering a child.

The contract was ratified overwhelmingly by members of the 13 Cook County locals. At the ratification meetings, members were thrilled that they would be able to spend more time with their partners and their newborns.

“At the ratification meetings, people were high-fiving and fist-bumping,” said Cisneros. “We got this done at just the right time for a lot of folks.”

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman and included representatives from all 13 AFSCME local unions in Cook County government.

Waukegan library workers win first contract

FOR THE NEW AFSCME MEMBERS at the Waukegan Public Library (WPL) in Chicago’s northern suburbs, the first chapter in the story of their union ends on a high note: They’ve won a first contract guaranteeing them a strong voice on the job and fair wages that reflect how valued they are

“Now we have a safety net. We have a voice and people who are looking out for us.”

in their community.

Working under a new library administration in early 2020, arbitrary new rules hampered their ability to do their jobs. Job duties were frustratingly inconsistent and could change at the drop of a hat. Staff numbers shrank from 70 to just 35 in the span of a year.

The mass exodus of respected, experienced staff sounded the alarm for WPL workers. They knew that if they wanted to keep serving the community they know and love, they needed a stronger voice. They knew they needed a union.

Rosario Colin, a children’s reference assistant and a member of the AFSCME bargaining committee, said WPL workers began organizing to reclaim the voice they had lost under the new administration.

“We were going up against an administration that didn’t hear us and didn’t see us. They treated us like cogs in a machine,” Colin said. “They didn’t care about the history that we had with the library and the impact we made as individuals.”

WPL workers organized and their union was officially

certified with AFSCME Council 31 in December 2021. The union represents 38 library clerks, specialists, assistants, associates, coordinators and librarians.

As they began bargaining their first contract in spring 2022, one of their priorities was to establish a grievance process through which they could settle disagreements with management. Another was to make sure wages were fairly and equally distributed—something that hadn’t always been done in the past.

The contract they ultimately ratified in May accomplishes that and more.

Without a union, raises used to come sporadically or not at all. Under their new union contract, employees will be placed on a step plan that immediately boosts the entire bargaining unit’s pay by a minimum of 7%. Raises and cost-of-living adjustments are guaranteed in each year of the contract.

“Now we have a safety net. We have a voice and people who are looking out for us,” said Vanessa Harris, a reference associate who has worked at the WPL for 15 years. “And

we’ve built this union not just for us, but for everyone who walks through these doors in the future.”

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Erik Thorson and included Annalisa Teresi, Beth Reblin, Dawn Larson and Colin.

Local 1334 wins pay parity in new contract

WHEN THEY ENTERED BARGAINING, the 110 members of AFSCME Local 1334—which represents the support staff of Glen Ellyn School District 41—knew they had to fight hard to bring their pay up to par with other school districts in their area.

Another area of concern for the support staff was the policies surrounding substitute teaching. Support staff are frequently pulled to substitute teach—some as often as three times a week, leaving them with little time to perform their other duties, which largely include tutoring students struggling in certain subject areas.

A lot of the bargaining committee’s efforts early in negotiations were dedicated to just getting management to see things through their eyes: how the substitute teaching

policies affected them and their students, how the inadequate pay was threatening to lead to staff turnover and more.

They came into negotiations armed with statistics about what neighboring districts were paying, which initially took management aback.

“After they reviewed the pay stats, they came back and said, ‘You’re right. You guys need a raise,’” said Karen Stockhausen, a math and reading interventionist who sat on the bargaining committee.

In the end, the contract Local 1334 ratified increases wages by \$4 across the board. Starting wages go up 25% and on July 1, 2024, every worker will receive an hourly increase of 5%, plus an additional \$1 an hour.

They also won a higher substitute-teaching stipend, now up to \$43 per day.

“Our bargaining committee fought really hard,” Stockhausen said. “In the end, we were finally listened to, and they respected us. Everybody came out feeling like this was a fair deal.”

The Local 1334 bargaining committee was led by Staff Representative Rick Surber and included Stockhausen, Kathy Maxon, Jennifer Lopez, Amy Sabalasky, Colleen Costello, Stephanie Harmen, Briana Morten, Maria Vichio and Lisa Golojuch. 

SHORT REPORTS



Members of SAG-AFTRA on strike in Hawaii. Photo courtesy of SAG-AFTRA.

AFSCME Florida responds to new anti-union law by organizing

ANTI-WORKER GOV. RON DeSantis signed an anti-union bill into law in May, but AFSCME Florida members have launched an all-out effort to fight back.

The new law, SB 256, requires that anti-union language be added to membership cards, imposes costly and frequent auditing procedures on unions, and more.

In an effort to make it more difficult for members to pay dues, the new law bans payroll deduction of dues and requires that members manually pay their dues via credit card or check.

But AFSCME members across Florida are determined to push back against efforts by DeSantis and his anti-union allies in the legislature.

“Freedom has always been earned from the bottom up,” AFSCME Florida President and International Vice President Vicki Hall said in a statement after DeSantis signed the bill. “That is why we believe the collective voice of workers will overcome SB 256’s goal of silencing Florida’s dedicated public workers by stripping them of their freedom to speak up collectively and their right to join a union.”

“Make no mistake, today is not the end, it is the start of

the next chapter in our fight for justice, equality and freedom at work,” Hall said.

Members are now working on an intensive internal organizing effort to sign up every eligible worker, including existing members, onto new membership cards.

“Governor DeSantis is trying to break us,” Hall said, “but we will show that while extremist politicians come and go, our basic rights can never be erased.”

Three AFSCME locals in south Florida, together with a member from each, filed a lawsuit seeking to block the statute from taking effect the very same day that it was signed by the governor. Filed in state court, the lawsuit argues that SB 256 violates the state Constitution, which explicitly protects the right to collective bargaining in its Declaration of Rights.

Workers across the nation on strike

MEMBERS OF SAG-AFTRA, the union representing television, movie and theater actors have gone out on strike, joining their writing colleagues in the Writers Guild of America (WGA) on the strike line.

The last time both unions were on strike at the same time was 1960. Through those strikes, the current system of residual payments was born

and both writers and actors unions won pensions and health insurance plans.

Today these workers are demanding a fairer share of residual earnings from the productions they worked on, stronger safeguards against studios’ use of artificial intelligence and more equitable

demanding just 2% of the revenue from streaming shows be shared with their members in the form of residuals. The consortium of studios rejected the proposal.

Hollywood bosses have been dismissive of the union members’ concerns and more concerned with the bottom

Shame on them.”

Meanwhile, members of the WGA are entering their third month on strike.

As *On the Move* went to press, UPS workers—some 340,000 in all—were preparing to set up their own strike lines. Members of the Teamsters Union have voted to authorize



AFSCME Florida members have launched an intensive internal organizing campaign to fight back against new anti-union laws pushed by Gov. DeSantis.

employer contributions to pension and healthcare plans.

Very few actors become such stars that they earn millions from their work. The vast majority of actors are cast in small parts on television shows or act in regional theater productions.

The rise of the streaming ecosystem has been an economic boon for studios, but not for the workers who make it happen. In contract negotiations, SAG-AFTRA was

line of their companies. Disney CEO Bob Iger, who made \$45.9 million in 2021, called the strikes “disturbing” and “very disruptive.”

“We are being victimized by a very greedy entity,” SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher said in response to Iger’s comments. “[The studios] plead poverty, [they say] that they’re losing money left and right when they’re giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs. It is disgusting.

a strike if they don’t reach a new agreement by July 31, when their previous contract expires.

Negotiations with UPS stalled in mid-July, with the Teamsters saying that UPS has made it clear it “doesn’t view its workforce as a priority.”

“UPS should stop wasting time and money on training strikebreakers and get back to the negotiating table with a real economic offer,” the union said in a statement. 

RETIREE NOTES



Nursing Home Reform

“ANYONE WHO HAS HAD ANY family members in nursing homes, either for rehabilitation or near the end of life, understands that the standard of care is very dependent on having enough staff,” said Liam McDonnell, member of AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 86 in Springfield. Like many Americans, McDonnell has had many family members in and out of long-term care.

In fact, there is a growing demand for rehabilitation and long-term services and supports (LTSS). By 2030, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, one in five U.S. adults 65 years or older will need

LTSS, including assistance with personal care activities such as bathing, dressing or other daily living tasks.

But nursing homes have been understaffed for decades. In 2003 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that the vast majority of facilities were not even meeting state staffing ratios where they existed.

The pandemic made things worse. More than one in five of all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. took place in long-term care settings. An estimated 200,000 care workers have left their jobs since 2020.

To better protect nursing home residents, the Biden Administration has been working for the past year to establish a minimum staffing

standard for skilled nursing facilities. Bolstered by numerous studies showing that higher staffing levels means better care, this would be the first-ever federally required minimum staffing hours per resident per day.

The nursing home industry opposes the standard, claiming they can't find staff to fill the positions.

Attracting staff has been difficult due to systemically low wages. According to the AFL-CIO, the median hourly wage for nursing home workers is \$13.56, and the median annual salary is only \$20,200. As a result, 44% of this workforce lives at or near the poverty line and 45% relies on some kind of public assistance.

Biden's proposed standard would also improve compensation and make it easier for nursing home workers to join a union.

When McDonnell's father was in a nursing home in 2000, he supported the employees' efforts to organize.

“My father told me that if you want a nursing home to function at its best, you must pay staff a living wage so they can stay long enough to establish relationships with residents,” he said.

Federal policy reforms should ensure safe staffing levels and appropriate benefits and compensation. Simply put,



SUB-CHAPTER 86 RECOGNIZED FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

Members of Retirees Sub-chapter 86 were recognized by Fifth Street Renaissance, a community organization that provides assistance to low-income seniors and homeless people in Springfield.

Sub-chapter 86 retirees continue to volunteer for the organization, for which they received an award recognizing their “outstanding generosity and dedication.”

nursing homes should have a registered nurse on-site 24/7 and a strong, quantitative staffing standard for direct nursing care, including RNs, LPNs and CNAs.

All working people who care about improving the quality of care and the quality of jobs in nursing homes need to spread the word about this landmark policy initiative. 🦋

MONITORING YOUR PENSION

Retirement systems deal with many types of deductions—such as federal tax withholding, insurance premiums or various garnishments—before calculating and sending out a pension benefit. That's why it's important to review your pension statement on a regular basis and keep an eye on the actual benefit amount going into your bank account every month.

Each retirement system has a different way for participants to access this information. For example, in 2014, the state passed a statute that instructed each state agency to implement a secure website for employees to access an electronic version of their pension statement.

To meet this mandate, the State Employees Retirement System (SERS) created a Member Services website to provide secure interactive access to earnings statements issued after July 1, 2014. From that point on, the Comptroller no longer sent earnings statements in the mail.

Please see the contact information for your retirement system below.

- **SERS:** Find your pension information through your SERS member services account at ilsrs.illinois.gov/sers.html. If you need help to set it up or don't have a computer, you can call SERS at (217) 785-7444.
- **State Universities Retirement System (SURS):** Find your pension information through the SURS member website (surs.org). For help, call SURS at (217) 378-8800.
- **Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF):** Find your pension information through the IMRF website at imrf.org. With questions, call IMRF at (800) 275-4673.
- **City of Chicago Municipal Employees Annuity and Benefit Fund (MEABF):** There is no member portal online, so to find your pension information, call MEABF at (312) 236-4700 or email them through via meabf.org/contact-us.
- **Cook County Pension Fund (CCPF):** There is no web portal. For pension information, call CCPF at (312) 603-1200 or send a message at cookcountypension.com/contact.



How did you first get involved with your local union?

I first got involved in our union's bargaining committee in 2019. It was just time for me to step up.

everything done in one appointment, I tell them we'll do it in baby steps over a couple weeks.

For the most part they're grateful to have the service done. Even though it hurts, they're appreciative.

Soon after that I took the steward training and I got certified. Then I went to AFSCME's activism summer class. There were a lot of unjust things happening at the prison at that time, so as a steward, I've always been kept busy fighting for our members.

As a steward, if someone has a legitimate complaint, sometimes it's something you can fix informally. When the contract is violated, you have to file a grievance, and you go through those steps. Wexford doesn't want to bend at all. There are so many contract violations generally, it's difficult to get them all resolved, but we stay on top of them as best we can.

How has your union helped Wexford employees?

When I first started in 1997, I thought I might stay at Wexford for a couple years and then go back into private practice. But when we became union, there was no way I could have left. There are all sorts of things that Wexford management does that are wrong. And we're able to get most of them fixed. But if we weren't union, we wouldn't have the pathways there to get those things fixed. We wouldn't have a grievance procedure; we wouldn't have a voice or representation. Those are the things that make us strong.

Marci Smith

DENTAL HYGIENIST

AFSCME Local 2856

Tell us about your job.

I'm a dental hygienist with Wexford Health Services, which is a private vendor that provides medical care to inmates in the Department of Corrections. I work at Graham Correctional Center, but I've worked in prisons all over the state since I started with Wexford in 1997.

On a typical day, I'm providing dental care. A lot of the patients I see haven't had routine dental care. Sometimes it's been years, and sometimes they've never seen a dentist in their entire life. We try to educate them on how to have proper hygiene and continue to do follow-up visits with them. We want them to start to maintain their teeth on their own so they can hopefully keep them for a lifetime.

What kind of challenges come with providing health care in a prison setting?

You always have to be aware of your surroundings. In private practice, you don't necessarily need to be paying close attention to everything that's going on inside the room. You have to

count your instruments and make sure your instruments are secure. There are so many different aspects to cleaning a prisoner's teeth. In private

practice, you're not watching everything that's going on while you're cleaning someone's teeth. Here, you have to be cognizant of everything that could compromise security. You always have to be aware of your surroundings at all times.

How do you find fulfillment in your work?

Being able to help people like this makes me feel good. I'm one of those people who tries to do the best job I can do no matter what. If we can't get

“If we weren't union...we wouldn't have a grievance procedure; we wouldn't have a voice or representation. Those are the things that make us strong.”

What does solidarity mean to you?

It means being a unified family. It means recognizing that we're stronger in numbers. We can make more progress if we stand together. We stand by each other at work, we stand by each other in negotiations and fight for what we believe in. We fight for what we deserve and that can only be achieved if we stay unified. 