

ON THE

MOVE



SAFETY MATTERS!

Council 31
AFSCME

KEEP MY DADDY SAFE

SAFETY MATTERS

Council 31
AFSCME

Our Safety Matters!

PAGE 10

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION
IN REVIEW PAGE 5

AT LAST: CHICAGO CLINICS
REOPENING PAGE 6

THE TRUE COST OF
LOW WAGES PAGES 8-9



ON THE MOVE

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

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

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

Executive Director
Roberta Lynch

Deputy Director
Mike Newman

State Sector Executive Vice-President
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

University Sector Executive Vice-President
Charles Carver, Local 1110

Private Sector Executive Vice-President
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237

Local Government Executive Vice-President
John Rayburn, Local 1215

Secretary
Miguel Vazquez, Local 3297

Treasurer
Terrence Boone, Local 672

BOARD MEMBERS

State Conference Board Co-Chairs
Arnold Black, Local 2971
Cody Dornes, Local 46
Tim Worker, Local 993

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS
Martha Bernice Stroger, Local 55
D. Safiya Felters, Local 2854
Susanne Littlefield, Local 2912
Timothy Olaosebikan, Local 3492
Kobie Robinson, Local 3835

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS
Terrence Boone, Local 672
Tom Opolony, Local 89
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693
Loretta Soresie, Local 2615
Alice Sutherland, Local 448
Danny Williams, Local 29

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS
Jack Matthews, Local 1964
Nicholas McLaughlin, Local 2856
Kimberly Pope, Local 981
Trudy Williams, Local 3433

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

TRUSTEES
Bonnie Brimm, Local 3280
William Lee, Local 494

RETIREE CHAPTER 31 PRESIDENT
Larry Brown

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Sounding the alarm on Project 2025

The corporate elite's plan to reshape America



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US STANDING TOGETHER TO PROTECT OUR FREEDOMS AND IMPROVE OUR LIVES.

What's at stake in the election this November? A lot, actually. The media chatter is all about candidates' personalities or their personal lives—not so much about their policies or political goals. And that's where Project 2025 comes in.

Project 2025 is an initiative of the Heritage Foundation—a corporate-backed think tank—to create a governing agenda for a Trump administration. President Trump says he hasn't even read it—and that may well be the case. But plenty of folks on his team have certainly done so. In fact, more than two-thirds of its authors served in the Trump administration. And 64% of the recommendations in a similar Heritage Foundation document issued a decade ago were implemented by Trump during his term as president.

Moreover, many of the ideas in the current document have already been incorporated in the 2024 Republican Party platform.

In other words, Project 2025 provides us with a very wide window to look ahead at what a new Trump administration would bring—and it's an alarming vista for America's working families.

It took generations to build a strong labor movement in our country with unions in almost every sector of the economy that can establish (and enforce!) rights on the job, foster safer working conditions, secure access to health care, and raise wages. Study after study has demonstrated that workers in unions on average earn 11% more than workers who don't have union representation. That's the union difference—and it makes a big difference in the quality of life for working people in our country.

Project 2025 backers want to throw a giant wrecking ball at the American labor movement. They would ban project labor agreements and repeal Davis-Bacon wage standards, striking at the heart of building trades unions.

They would weaken the National Labor Relations Board

to make it harder for workers to form unions. And then they would gut labor laws to allow employers to push union decertification campaigns even once a union contract is in effect.

They want to weaken the "influence of labor unions" by pushing workers into powerless "employee involvement organizations."

Even more dangerous, Project 2025's promoters would lead the charge for a national law banning unions for public employees. Yes, they would try to prevent any public employee anywhere from being able to be part of a union.

And when all the unions are gone, they don't want to stop there. They would change overtime regulations to reduce the amount employees receive. They would greatly reduce restrictions on child labor. They would provide exemptions for employers from the Fair Labor Standards Act. And they would eliminate civil service protections for federal employees and terminate them by the thousands.

There is much that a Trump administration could do by executive fiat—and Trump has repeatedly stated his intent to do so—especially since he knows the U.S. Supreme Court will back him up. In fact, the court has already more or less guaranteed him immunity even if he actually violates the law.

The reality is that Project 2025 is out to dismantle the system of checks and balances that have always been the hallmark of our democracy.

The document is almost 1,000 pages long so it covers more ground than I could possibly sum up here. But it's safe to say that another key Project 2025 goal is the remaking of the American economy and of American society more broadly to provide more freedom for cor-

porations to exploit workers, to rip off consumers, and to harm the environment, while providing less—far less—liberty for the average citizen.

That means shifting more of the burden for steadily rising health care costs onto the backs of consumers, especially senior citizens. Project 2025 calls for repealing the monthly cap on insulin costs under Medicare and blocking Medicare's \$2,000 annual limit on out-of-pocket drug costs that is scheduled to go into effect in 2025.

Its backers are big pushers of privatization in all its forms. They actually included a provision to repeal the federal standards that bar privatization of unemployment services.


No surprise, their biggest target is public education. They want to shift to a system whereby all federal funding for education goes to voucher programs rather than helping local governments to fund public schools.

Plus, they want to completely eliminate the Head Start program which has provided millions of low-income children with an early childhood education.

There's much more, of course. But the bottom line is that the corporate elite is paying attention—a lot of attention—to policy matters. And we need to do so as well.

If we want to build our union ever stronger and see all of labor grow too, then we have to firmly reject Project 2025 and all of its offshoots that are embedded in the Trump campaign.

If we want to reduce the ballooning economic inequality in our country—with the numbers of billionaires steadily growing while so many people who work hard day in and day out can barely pay their bills—then we have to be prepared to take our commitment to fairness and justice straight to the ballot box.

And if we want to stop Project 2025 right in its tracks, we have to make sure that our families, friends and neighbors understand just how real the threat is. We can't sit this one out—and we should try to make sure no one else does either. It will take all of us standing together—and voting together—to protect our freedoms and to improve our lives. 

AFSCME members pack hearings on Stateville & Logan closure plans

On June 11 and 13, hundreds of AFSCME members from Locals 1866 at Stateville Correctional Center and 2073 at Logan Correctional Center made their voices heard at two Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA) community hearings on the state Department of Corrections' proposed closures of those facilities.

At both hearings, Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman laid out a sweeping and compelling critique of the IDOC plan, making clear that there is no sound rationale for the course the department is pursuing.

Many union members also delivered forceful testimony—and dozens more submitted written comments—strongly urging the commission to reject IDOC's plans, which would close Stateville immediately while the facility is rebuilt, and close Logan in three to five years after a new facility is completed more than 100 miles away in Will County.

Stateville employees fight back

Surveying the hotel ballroom where the COGFA hearing on the proposed closure of Stateville was being held, lawmakers could scarcely see anything but AFSCME green.

Hundreds of Stateville employees, joined by members of nearby AFSCME locals, packed the room. One after another, frontline Stateville staff came forward to deliver testimony that exposed serious factual and logistical flaws

in IDOC's plans to close and rebuild Stateville.

They laid bare what it would mean for incarcerated individuals to lose Stateville's second-to-none educational programming. Lt. Matthew Zemantis, who works in the education building, said the popularity of Stateville's programming has even led to a wait list of individuals seeking to transfer to the facility for the purpose of enrolling in those programs.

One question that the department was unable or unwilling to answer is why it insists on shutting down the prison in order to rebuild when there is so much empty land on its campus. Local 1866 Vice President Charles Mathis summed up how that lack of concern for Stateville workers is impacting their lives and families.

"When I hear everything the department has said to the world and to its dedicated employees who report to work every day, about how this so-called temporary closure would work, it's clear that IDOC hasn't thought about how closing Stateville for several years would impact my life, my family's life and the lives of my co-workers," Mathis said.



AFSCME members, their friends and family, and members of other unions rally on June 13 before the COGFA hearing in Lincoln.

"Logan does not work without us"

Hundreds of members of AFSCME Local 2073, their supporters in the community and other nearby AFSCME members marched together through the streets of Lincoln to the community hearing on the proposed closure and relocation of Logan CC to northern Illinois.

Their chant echoed down Lincoln's main thoroughfare:

"What do we want?"

"Logan CC!"

"Where do we want it?"

"In Logan County!"

One key flaw in IDOC's plans is that moving the facility from its central location would seriously disrupt the lives of individuals in custody and their families. Logan is the only women's receiving and classification facility in the state, meaning that every female who is sentenced must come to Logan for intake processing.

In the past two years, only 35% of Logan's intake has come from the Chicagoland area. Moving the reception center north would mean longer transport times for writs for the majority of individuals in custody and their loved ones.

Because of its unique mission of housing offenders from minimum to maximum classifications, Logan's staff must wear many different hats on any given day. Logan houses some of the most severely mentally ill individuals in the state, requiring highly specialized treatment.

The facility's diverse mission and population leads to a staff that is simply "the best at what we do," said Local 2073 President Kenny Johnson. In other words, they are irreplaceable.

No vote taken by COGFA

COGFA had planned to make a formal recommendation on the IDOC closure plans at a special meeting on June 14. While the commission did not have the quorum necessary to make an official recommendation at that time, the COGFA members who had attended the community hearings expressed a number of serious questions and concerns with the plan, with opposition reaching across party lines.


Sen. Dave Koehler, COGFA co-chair, said at the hearing that Stateville should remain open while a new facility is built nearby, and urged IDOC to better engage with employees, their families, those incarcerated at the prison and the local community.

Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer, another COGFA co-chair, said that the repercussions for the city of Lincoln could be dire if Logan is allowed to be shuttered, and said the process could push employees to quit their jobs.

In response to the lack of a quorum at the meeting, Council 31 issued the following statement:

"Members of the commission have spent two months studying this proposal, asking questions and getting input. Today, all lawmakers present expressed grave concern about the dearth of details provided and the lack of any real plan. The absence of other commission members also reflects the absence of support for the proposal. No member of the commission spoke in favor.

"Today's outcome, and the large crowds and countless concerns raised at this week's COGFA hearings in Joliet and Lincoln, all affirm the same thing: The Department of Corrections should rescind its closure threats, slow down, and work with our union and other concerned parties to develop a better rebuilding plan. For the state prison system, its employees, individuals in custody and their families, that's the right thing to do."

The COGFA process is only the beginning. To prevent disruption and increased danger throughout the correctional system, the union's fight will go on to keep Stateville and Logan correctional centers open while new facilities are built in the current location. 



At the June 11 COGFA hearing on the proposed Stateville closure, a sea of green greeted lawmakers on the panel.

Shedd Aquarium employees blow the whistle on anti-union campaign

Workers at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium are fighting back against management's aggressive anti-union campaign with a wave of support from elected officials.

Flanked by more than a dozen lawmakers, Shedd workers held a press conference outside the aquarium on June 5 to call on management to end its union-busting.

Another 150 elected officials at the federal, state and local levels—including five congresspeople, 80 members of the General Assembly and 43 Chicago alderpeople—signed onto a letter proudly standing with the workers and calling on Shedd management to respect their rights to organize free of intimidation.

"For visitors, Shedd is a place of joy and discovery," said Kirby Garcia, a member of the organizing committee who works in Shedd's marketing department. "For workers, management's campaign is

making it a place of animosity and division."

Shedd's top managers are using scare tactics and misinformation in an attempt to divide and intimidate workers. Shedd leadership has:

- Required employees to attend captive-audience meetings (a practice that would be banned under a measure recently enacted by the Illinois legislature) at which Shedd CEO Bridget Coughlin told workers not to sign union cards and said, "We're a family, we don't need a union" because "a union would disrupt our work".
- Threatened workers with the loss of pay, benefits and flexibility if they form a union.
- Called individual employees into one-on-one meetings with their immediate supervisors to



Kirby Garcia, a member of the Shedd Workers United/AFSCME organizing committee, calls out management's anti-union campaign alongside elected officials.

push anti-union claims.

- Torn down or removed pro-union literature, blocked union emails and told employees they cannot share union information at work.


Becca Palka, a senior aquarist with more than a decade of experience caring for fish, said

that everyone who works at the Shedd is passionate about educating the public on marine life and caring for the animals.

"But that passion can be exploited," Palka said at the press conference.

Palka said that 10 of her co-workers have left the Shedd

for other institutions—driven away by poor wages and benefits and a lack of support from management.

Shedd workers vowed not to back down in the face of management's anti-union tactics and will keep fighting for their union. 

Illinois Central bus drivers and monitors join AFSCME

The 52 school bus drivers and monitors from the Illinois Central bus company near Peoria have seen what AFSCME has accomplished for other school bus drivers in their region.

Now they've formed their own union with AFSCME Council 31 so they can achieve what they've always wanted: fair pay and respect from management.

Brad Corkron, a school bus driver at Illinois Central for nine years, said that without a union employees could be fired for any infraction, no matter how small. Management would play favorites and deny promotions and safety accommodations to drivers and monitors they didn't like. Workers vowed to form

their union to end that unfair treatment.

"With a union, we'll have our stewards, and those kinds of conversation won't happen without a steward present," Corkron said. "Then the bosses will be held accountable."

Management fought the attempt to unionize every step of the way. They held an anti-union captive audience meeting where they told monitors if they wanted to earn more money, they could just become a driver instead. (Such meetings are now illegal after



Illinois Central bus drivers and monitors officially formed their union with AFSCME in June.

AFSCME helped pass a bill banning them in the spring legislative session.)


"What they said to monitors was essentially, 'You're a dime a dozen,'" Corkron said.

The meeting backfired on management, strengthening the commitment of many

workers to continue fighting to form their union.

On top of winning respect, safer conditions and dignity on the job, employees are eager to fight for better pay for extra work like field trips and taking students to athletic events. They also want to close the

wage gap between drivers and monitors.

"I lived in Georgia and saw how bad things are when unions are weakened," Corkron said. "Once I got back to the great state of unions that is Illinois, I said I would never work for a company without one." 

2024 Legislative Session in Review



The Illinois General Assembly considers thousands of bills in a matter of a few months, so getting our union's message across takes intensive lobbying at the Capitol by the Council 31 legislative team, as well as vigorous grassroots lobbying efforts by union members.

Below are some of the key issues that AFSCME worked on in the spring session that wrapped up in May—including the bills we helped pass, and those dangerous bills we helped shut down.

Fiscal Year 2025 State Budget

After considerable deliberation, the General Assembly adopted a FY2025 budget that includes \$1.1 billion in revenue increases from changes to current tax laws that predominantly target corporations and sports betting.

Gov. Pritzker's proposal to repeal the statewide grocery tax, which drew opposition due to the revenue loss for municipal budgets, was adopted effective January 1, 2026. As part of the budget package, the General Assembly included various measures to assist local governments in recouping lost revenue, including giving them the authority to adopt a local grocery tax by

ordinance.

The enacted state budget demonstrates the legislature's continued commitment to investing in K-12 education. Illinois' school districts will receive a \$350 million increase in funding.

Unfortunately, the budget for higher education fell far short of AFSCME's goals: The final higher ed budget includes just a 2% increase to general operating funds. However, it increased investments in grants and MAP funding for students and capital funds to address deferred maintenance.

The FY25 budget fully funds the state's required contributions to the state retirement systems as well as the State Employee Group Insurance program and Upward Mobility. Additionally, the budget plan appears to effectively fund an authorized headcount in state government which includes the funding of nearly 8,000 vacancies as well as the governor's recommended headcount increases.

Both Logan and Stateville correctional centers are fully funded in the enacted FY25 budget in addition to the capital development dollars for rebuilding, but that doesn't mean the IDOC has withdrawn its ill-advised plan to close these facilities (see page 3).

AFSCME SUPPORTED

HB 3519/SB3628

Fix Tier 2 Pensions

AFSCME supported bills to address the inequity and unfairness of Tier 2 pensions. The bills remain in the House Rules Committee and Senate Committee on Assignments and were not called for a vote. However, the legislation did begin a critical dialogue on the injustice of the two-tier pension systems. By deluging legislators with phone calls and emails in April, our campaign to "Fix Tier 2" brought this issue to the forefront and laid the groundwork for further upcoming actions.

HB 4962/SB 3399

DSP Wage Increase

Our union led the fight to add funding for wage increases for direct support professionals (DSPs) at nonprofit human service agencies in the final budget. We succeeded in securing an increase of \$1 an hour. Gov. Pritzker's original budget plan did not include any increase at

all for DSPs, but our union's grassroots lobbying efforts convinced legislators that funding was urgently needed. The governor ultimately signed the budget with the additional funding included.

HB 5324

Reducing Delays at Illinois Labor Relations Board

This legislation passed both chambers of the legislature. It was introduced to address the chronic delays at the public employee labor boards at precisely the times when their intervention is most urgently needed: when employers commit unfair labor practices. Council 31 lobbyists overcame strong opposition from the labor boards which did not want to be held to any timeliness standards at all.

HB5572/SB 3649

Employee Freedom of Speech Act

This legislation bars employers in both the public and private sector from requiring employees to attend meetings intended to promulgate the employer's political views—for example, hostility to unions. This legislation passed both chambers of the legislature.

HB 4417

Establishment of DOC Office of Workplace Safety

This legislation was sponsored by former AFSCME local union President and now-State

Representative Gregg Johnson. It would create an Office of Workplace Safety within the Department of Corrections to assess the department's compliance with safety laws and regulations and make recommendations to improve safety in the workplace. The legislation passed the House unanimously, but the Senate did not take the measure up for a vote.

AFSCME OPPOSED


SB1919

Public-Private Partnership Act

This legislation would have made it easier for state agencies and local governments to privatize certain public work. AFSCME opposes any effort to privatize government services, and this bill was never called for a vote.

HB 5192

Arbitrary Cuts to State Spending

This Republican-sponsored bill would have mandated that the state reduce discretionary spending by 5%, citing inflation as the reason for the cuts. However, it would have had no impact on reducing inflation and would have had serious negative consequences for AFSCME members and public services that Illinoisans rely on. AFSCME opposed the bill and no vote was called on it. 

After long fight, Chicago finally reopening mental health clinics

For more than a decade, AFSCME members and allies have been fighting to rebuild the network of city-run mental health clinics that were shuttered, neglected or ignored by the administrations of mayors Daley, Emanuel and Lightfoot.

Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) clinicians provide a wide range of therapy and support for adults, families, adolescents and children, for everything from stress, trauma and depression to psychiatric disorders. Clinic closures and layoffs shrunk the public mental health safety net, pushing the responsibility on private providers and raising barriers to access for city residents.

But now, with the support and leadership of Mayor Brandon Johnson, real progress is finally being made. Steps are being taken to staff existing clinics appropriately, ground-work is being laid for new clinics to open, and innovative pilot programs—like pairing mental health workers with first responders and offering clinical services in city libraries—are expanding.

“I’m very passionate about this. It’s bringing back life to communities that were stripped of the supportive services they need,” said Miguel Oviedo, a CDPH clinical therapist and member of AFSCME Local 505. “Especially after Rahm Emanuel’s administration, that support

was taken away in many areas of the city. It was sad to see those resources being shut down. Now we’re restoring mental health to neighborhoods that need it. It’s very exciting.”

The right side wins

Two new clinics are slated to open this year, starting with the Lower West clinic in the Pilsen neighborhood in August and followed by the Roseland clinic in the coming months when its build-out is complete.

Each clinic will have six or seven therapists, four or five support staff, and a psychiatric nurse practitioner.

The Roseland site was among several clinics closed under Rahm Emanuel in 2011. CDPH clinical therapist and Local 505 member Jay Roth worked at Roseland at the time.

A Far South Side neighborhood that’s suffered from decades of disinvestment, Roseland “is a forgotten part of Chicago to those who don’t live there,” Roth said. “The clinic had a real presence. People knew through their networks that it was a place to get services in



Mayor Brandon Johnson announces the opening of the Roseland clinic as Council 31 Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Adrienne Alexander (left) looks on.

times of need. When it closed, it was heartbreaking. People had the sense that they were being abandoned.”

The long battle to reopen the Roseland clinic is hopefully just a first step, but a welcome one.

“It’s hard not to feel angry and frustrated about the powers that be who made the past bad decisions, but if people’s needs will be the priority now, that’s good,” Roth says. “It didn’t seem at the time that there was any hope for these clinics to come back. It felt futile to fight. But

we didn’t give up, political tides turned, and that’s a great thing. It’s gratifying when the right side wins.”

“AFSCME never quits,” said Jo Patton, retired Council 31 special projects director, who was the key strategist in those early battles and helped to maintain the activist network through the years.

Expanding care

CDPH is also taking steps to expand and make permanent two

pilot programs that provide public mental health services outside the clinic setting.

In one effort, a CDPH clinician will now be permanently posted one day each week at the Legler Library in the Garfield Park neighborhood. The pilot phase showed that reaching out to people in their communities can raise awareness of CDPH and lower barriers to access.

The other effort is a significant expansion of Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) teams that pair CDPH mental health workers with first responders in an effort to adequately treat mental health crises and avoid disproportionate law enforcement involvement. The city is in the process of hiring 40 to 50 new staff to bolster existing CARE teams and expanding the program’s reach into new service areas.

Finally, the department has reinstated the Clinical Therapist II position it eliminated during the Emanuel years. Since the position has lesser educational and licensing requirements than the Clinical Therapist III title the department has been relying on, opening up these posts will make it easier to hire young people just starting out in the field, enabling them to gain experience, pursue certification and build a career ladder within the city clinics.

Going forward, AFSCME Council 31 staff representative Colin Theis said, “The Johnson Administration has committed to continuing to open more clinics, and our union is committed to collaborating in that effort.”



Mental health advocates protest Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s closure of city clinics in 2011.

Effort to Fix Tier 2 pensions continues before fall legislative session

With some 5,000 phone calls made and more than 56,000 emails sent to legislators this spring demanding an equitable and adequate retirement for all public employees across the state, the We Are One Illinois coalition succeeded in getting our campaign to fix Tier 2 pensions on the General Assembly’s radar.

This effort was just the start, as fixing Tier 2 and ending the unfair divide in pension benefits will be a road with many challenges, chief among them the need to raise additional revenue to avoid jeopardizing

the stability of the pension funds.

The inadequate Tier 2 pension level affects all public employees who started employment on or after January 1, 2011. If you are on Tier 2, you

contribute the same amount towards retirement as those hired in 2010 or earlier, but you receive a lesser benefit when you retire and over the course of your retirement years.

While comprehensive legislation to fix Tier 2 across all public pension systems was not considered in the spring legislative session, we gained multiple assurances from lawmakers that they want to work to address this injustice. Fixing Tier 2 will only succeed with continued grassroots pressure to make sure these lawmakers keep their promises, and we gain enough support to pass pension fairness in the House and Senate.

Throughout the remainder of the summer, be on the

lookout for additional ways to get involved in the Tier 2 campaign. Together with the We Are One Illinois coalition of unions, educational events and member mobilization actions will continue to ensure that our voices are heard loud and clear as we approach the fall veto session.

“If we’re to succeed, we have to stand together—both Tier 1 and Tier 2 employees, and active and retired members—to fight for basic fairness in retirement,” said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “Be prepared to step up and make your voice heard as this effort ramps up and stay tuned for more ways you can get involved.”

“If we’re to succeed, we have to stand together—both Tier 1 and Tier 2 employees, and active and retired members—to fight for basic fairness in retirement.”

911 telecommunicator highlights need for Tier 2 fixes

A FSCME members everywhere have difficult and demanding jobs. We work long hours under stressful and often dangerous conditions.

When we dedicate our lives and careers to serving the public under often challenging conditions, we expect a few things in return: We expect our employers to do their best to keep us safe. We expect to be paid fairly for our hard work. And we expect to be able to retire before the negative effects of daily stress take a permanent toll.



Jenifer Martin

Under the Tier 2 pension system, AFSCME members like Jenifer Martin, a 911 telecommunicator in the city

of Alton and the president of AFSCME Local 3388, worry whether they’ll be able to make it to retirement before the demands of the job get to them.

Telecommunicators like Martin often hear people on the worst days of their lives. She’s heard people being shot at while they’re on the phone with her. She’s had people speak their dying words to her over the phone. She has people’s lives at her fingertips—not just members of the public who need her, but also the first responders whose movements she coordinates.

Martin has been doing this job for 12 years already—12 years of listening to violence and tragedy on a daily basis. At 49 years old, that would mean 18 more years until she can retire with full benefits on a Tier 2 pension.

“You don’t want people who are almost 70 answering

your 911 calls,” Martin said.

Martin’s experiences are unfortunately all too common. It’s not right that public employees commit their working lives to demanding and oftentimes dangerous jobs

only to have to worry if they’ll make it to retirement.

When it comes time later this summer to meet with legislators at regional We Are One Illinois town hall meetings, it’s stories like Jenifer’s

that will hit home for elected officials. We should all be prepared to come to a town hall meeting in our area to make sure our voices are heard.

Lawmakers need to know: It’s time to fix Tier 2.



CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO WORKERS TAKE ACTION!

Adult educators in AFSCME Local 3506 in the City Colleges of Chicago teach English as a Second Language and help adult students complete their GEDs. But the programs are suffering from a lack of investment—and adult educators and students are both paying the price as staffing levels drop and class offerings are reduced.

Local 3506 took to the picket line on July 2 to make sure CCC administration got the message: It’s time to fund adult education. It’s time for City Colleges to agree to a fair contract now.

THE TRUE COST OF LOW WAGES

Members of AFSCME Local 978 who work for LaSalle County are probation officers, nurses at the county nursing home, environmental program specialists, clerks for the state's attorney, 911 telecommunicators and more. Their work is essential to keeping the county safe, healthy and efficient. But their wages didn't reflect their worth.

When they started bargaining their new contract in the fall of 2023, many employees were still making only \$14 an hour. The union initially proposed a \$5 across-the-board hourly wage increase. It was more than reasonable, considering prices had risen by 25% since they settled their last contract in 2018.

But management's initial offer was downright insulting: just 45 cents.

The union bargaining committee was outraged. In the last year, they had seen upper management—mostly men—get raises of as much as \$10,000. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of Local 978 members are women. Many have families to support. Those same managers were offering them pennies.

Management couldn't understand the struggles workers faced day in and day out. They couldn't understand what it was like to be a single mom raising three kids on \$14 an hour. They couldn't understand what it was like to be a widow with late bills piling up. They couldn't understand being in such dire financial straits that you had to withdraw from savings to pay your electricity bill. They couldn't understand what it was like to be starting your career after college only to realize the only life you can afford is one of bare survival.

But Local 978 had a way to make them understand.

The bargaining committee asked members of the local to write personal letters to members of the LaSalle County Board describing the pain and hardship that their low wages caused in their lives. Dozens of members wrote letters. Each one was copied 30 times and the union sent them to each of the board members' home addresses.

"The amount of letters we sent, I was so impressed," said local president Sommer Churchill, an adult probation officer. "I was impressed that people were so vulnerable to share such private details about their finances. But at the same time, the letters were very, very disturbing. No one who works a full-time job in public service should ever have to struggle the way that our members were struggling."

At the next bargaining session, management never mentioned the letters, but their proposals were suddenly much more appropriate. The union was able to secure agreements at that same session.

The final contract raises wages by as much as 30% over the life of the contract, providing much needed relief that will give some of the lowest-paid workers room to breathe, and help them avoid the impossible choices with which they were faced.

Their contract also established their first-ever maternity leave policy, made gains in personal time off and won stronger uniform allowances.

Support for the new terms was strong. In all, 97% of the members voted to ratify, indicating strong member support for the agreements.

The Local 978 bargaining committee included Churchill, Shannon Mertes, Sonia Leadingham, Melissa Trujillo, Wendy Renteria, Michelle Corrigan and Leighann Knopinski, and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Dominic.

The below excerpts represent a sampling of the dozens of similar letters sent to LaSalle County Board members' homes.

Imagine yourself in our shoes. Imagine doing more work for much less money, working excessive amounts of overtime and having to miss out on family time, holidays, missing your kids sports games or even their graduation, even missing a family dinner. My family resides two hours [away] in Wisconsin, and I almost never have the opportunity to go up there due to not only the hours we have to work, but also not having enough money to fill my own gas tank to get there. I am fortunate enough to own my home, but I have to work two jobs to pay for it.

~ K.L., 911 Telecommunicator

After all my bills are paid I have about \$50 to my name! \$50 to get my daughter shoes, clothes and toys. I rarely get to go out with my daughter to do fun activities (zoo, arcade, Chuck E. Cheese, carnivals, A FAMILY VACTION etc.) due to the fact I'm STRUGGLING to get by with the wages I've been given from this county. If I choose to take her to do something I have no other choice but to skip a bill that needs paid! I'M TIRED OF HAVING TO DECIDE IF THE LIGHTS STAY ON OR IF I CAN TAKE MY CHILD TO DO AN ACTIVITY!!!!

~ J.D., Document Retention Technician

I have worked at the County Clerk's office for 11 years. Up until halfway through my employment I could live off of my wages, because I was married and had a second income. Unfortunately, my life took a drastic change due to a divorce and I ended up having to support myself off of low wages. I had no idea how I was going to support myself and with a daughter in college, I knew that something was going to have to change, so I took a second job and when that wasn't enough, I took a third job. This is barely enough money to cover my bills, it would've been nice to help my daughter out and cover the cost of a few books here and there, but with today's economy books are about \$100+, which is not in my budget.

~ J.C., Office Assistant

We do not live extravagantly. I would like to ask you if you could live on \$1600.00 per month bring-home pay. Poverty level for a 3-person family, which is what we are on a \$25,500.00 annual salary. It sure would be nice to be at a level to live a bit more comfortable. Please remember that I am a taxpayer and pay your wages, which I had NO say so in when you received a pay raise.

~ T.R., Office Clerk

I have a family of three, and I carry the insurance coverage for us all. When I get my check every 2 weeks more than half is deducted to pay for insurance, H.S.A. and taxes. I'm lucky to clear a little over \$550 per pay period. I have bills just like all adults, after a monthly car payment of \$450 and gas of about \$100 I'm left with about \$140 a week. Honestly how far can you make that go?

~ M.P., Housekeeping Aide

Our safety matters!

AFSCME members in IDOC and IDHS picket for safe workplaces

When confronted with management inaction in the wake of serious assaults on staff at their facilities, AFSCME members at Menard Correctional Center and Ludeman Developmental Center both decided enough was enough and took their fight for safe working conditions to the picket line.

Fighting for safety with solidarity at Menard CC

On July 8, AFSCME Local 1175 members at Menard Correctional Center took to the picket line with a simple message for the Illinois Department of Corrections: Our Safety Matters!

The picket was organized following a spate of assaults on correctional officers at Menard, a maximum-security facility that often receives individuals in custody who have committed assaults elsewhere in the system.

The numbers are shocking: From January to March, Menard staff experienced more than 30 assaults by incarcerated individuals. More recently, an offender head-butted an officer, breaking his nose, requiring hospitalization and surgery. The very next day, six officers required outside medical treatment following an assault by an offender swinging handcuffs as a weapon.

“As awful as these incidents were, we’re fortunate that they weren’t worse,” Local 1175 president and correctional sergeant Rick Hepp told *The Southern Illinoisan*. “But we can’t rely on good fortune. Before the worst can happen, we demand that management take responsibility for improving our working conditions.”

While Local 1175 organized the picket, the issues they face at Menard have become all too common at many other state prisons. Menard workers were joined in solidarity by AFSCME retirees and members of 10 other AFSCME locals—including those at Pickneyville, Robinson, Lawrence, Centralia, Graham, East Moline, Vandalia and Southwestern Correctional Centers—as well as members of the United Mine Workers of America.

The dangerous working environment for front-line workers at Menard is made worse by the severe understaffing at the facility. While Menard is the largest maximum-security facility in the state, housing 1,900



Members of AFSCME Local 1175 at Menard Correctional Center hold a press conference during their picket on July 8.

incarcerated individuals, it now has just 407 correctional officers in all—62% of the 657 officers allocated to the facility in the current budget—and just 748 total frontline employees versus 321 unfilled vacancies.

“Allocated headcount is considered the minimum requirement for a safe facility,” said AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Eddie Caumiant. “We’re running at half of that.”

Council 31 is demanding that the Department of Corrections meet with the union to discuss concrete steps being taken to make the facility safer, as well as to

provide information on how the department is filling the vacant positions at the facility.

“We will not back down until the department takes safety seriously, hires for the allocated positions, and makes the changes necessary to keep IDOC workers safe on the job,” Caumiant said.

Demanding safety in IDHS

Members of AFSCME Local 2645 at Ludeman Developmental Center took to the picket line in June to call attention to the growing number of assaults on staff under new changes management imposed on the facility.

Ludeman Developmental Center has historically only housed people with developmental disabilities. But recently, management has begun admitting dual-diagnosis individuals—that is, individuals with both a developmental or intellectual disability along with some form of mental illness.

Injuries to staff quickly followed. In recent months, a single individual with a dual diagnosis has caused serious injuries to staff. One Local 2645 member has had to have two separate surgeries to repair the damage caused to their hands. Another employee had part of their finger bitten off.

“We’ve always had injuries, but people are being injured in ways that used to

be uncommon,” said Crosby Smith, a Mental Health Technician II and President of AFSCME Local 2645. “Everyone who has worked here, and especially newer folks, don’t have the training we need to protect ourselves and the other individuals.”

The union has argued to management that the new classifications of individuals being admitted to Ludeman should come with additional specialized training, bolstered security staff and better equipment.

Of critical concern is the lack of the radios mental health techs need to communicate with one another in the event of an emergency. There could be a situation where a staff member or an individual is in grave danger, but no one would be able to respond because there’s no way to call for help.

But as the number of injuries continues to climb, management still has not given Ludeman employees the training and resources they need to do their jobs safely. Local 2645 members took to the picket line to make sure management’s inaction in the face of serious staff assaults will not stand.

“The message was that our safety matters,” Smith said. “They need to do everything they can to show us that it does matter, and there needs to be some urgency shown on their part in addressing these issues.”



Members of AFSCME Local 2645 picket for safety outside Ludeman Developmental Center.

AFSCME Scholarship winner: What AFSCME has done for my family

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

One of this year's winners is Alexendra Dooley, the daughter of Lisa Dooley, a McHenry County probation officer and member of AFSCME Local 1748. Alexendra plans to attend Northern Michigan University this fall.

Part of the scholarship process includes writing an essay on the importance of unions in today's workplaces. Below is an excerpt of Alexendra's winning essay.

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

LIKE MANY FAMILIES throughout the United States, my family comes from a line of migrant workers. My

great-grandfather came from Mexico as a migrant worker to work on the Texas ranches. He frequently had to leave his family for long periods of time during harvest season to live and work on the farms in Texas. The treatment many of these migrant workers endured was subpar but they were willing to comply to give their families a better life.

My grandfather worked his whole life as a welder and my grandma as a Frito-Lay factory worker. They both worked long days under conditions that would later affect their health.

But through their hard work, they were able to help put my mother through college, making her a first-generation

college student. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and has worked for McHenry County Court Services as a probation officer since the age of 24.

Her agency was not always part of a union and while she did not face nearly half of the working conditions that her parents endured, she was not experiencing all the benefits she could have if she was in a union.

In 2015, McHenry County Court Services became a part of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. Like many people in America, my mother was unsure of what changes could be made for her agency now that she was in a union. It became apparent to her rather quickly how drastically her work conditions were going to improve while in a union. Due to union support my mother and her colleagues were finally given a say in their working




Alexendra (left) and Lisa Dooley

conditions and what they felt could be improved.

Potentially the most beneficial aspect to our family with my mom now working in a union was the reevaluation of their pay to ensure that all employees were receiving a livable wage. This aspect is important to my mother and all other American laborers, especially with the cost of living rising. Too often we see the

cost of living rising with no rise in employee salaries.

As a result of AFSCME, my family has the peace of mind knowing that my mother gets to work in an environment that supports her best interests. Through each generation, my family's working conditions have improved and most recently I have been able to witness what AFSCME has done for my family. 

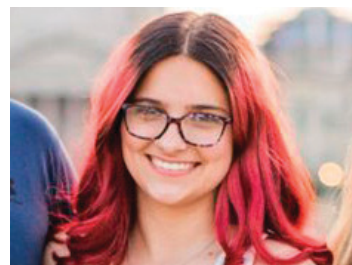
Meet AFSCME's Larry Marquardt Scholarship winners

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

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, despite having vastly different dreams for their studies and careers, will undoubtedly be assets to their universities, and later, the work they pursue.

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 at right.



Rylee Cass

Rylee Cass is the daughter of two AFSCME members: Rhondalea Cass, a member of AFSCME Local 2600 and a management operations analyst II at the Department of Human Services Bureau of SNAP Integrity in Springfield, and James Cass, a security therapy aide trainee at Packard Mental Health Center and member of AFSCME Local 2767.

Rylee plans to attend Illinois State University this fall, where she will study to become a high school math teacher.

"As a future high school teacher, the labor movement is crucial to me," Rylee wrote in her application essay. "Like other professionals, educators face challenges such as low wages and inadequate support. Through advocating for teachers' rights, the labor movement ensures educators have the resources to provide quality education. Furthermore, it's essential to teach students about the labor movement's history, empowering them to advocate for social and economic justice."



William Goetz

William Goetz is the son of Patricia Swanson, a public utilities cashier for the city of Ottawa and a member of AFSCME Local 2819.

William is studying metallurgical engineering at the University of Alabama. He hopes to one day have a career where he can test and assess the safety and efficiency of new automotive parts, and help create more sustainable manufacturing processes. He also is interested in developing innovations to public transportation to allow for greater reach to more rural areas.

"Without unions, unchecked power grabs via government or corporate America can shrink the areas of importance that unions work to protect," Goetz wrote. "Soon, I too would like to be a part of the labor movement that spearheads countless changes to benefit the working class and provide for millions of families in America."



Kimara Brodanex

Kimara is the daughter of Will County Deputy Clerk Tiffany Brown, a member of AFSCME Local 1028.

This fall she will be attending Florida A&M University, where she will study to become a pediatric nurse.

"The labor movement brings people together as a community because they are more likely all going through the same things," Brodanex wrote. "If workers know someone who is going through the same thing as they are, then they will be more likely to stand up for themselves, and stand up for what is right."



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Rockford Public Library employees rally before a board meeting to demand stronger safety measures.

Local 3350's strong contract follows strong action

AS THEY BEGAN BARGAINING a new contract in early 2024, Rockford Public Library workers' biggest priority was to expand health and safety procedures and secure a stronger voice for workers in the creation of those procedures.

In the library's downtown branch, workers have to respond to a variety of physical and mental health emergencies. Yet they'd never received formal training on how to properly respond to those emergencies. They'd never even had a fire drill.

Management resisted all of the union's attempts to secure more training and clearer safety procedures. When the Winnebago County Health Department offered to do a free training for library workers on how to use naloxone, commonly known as Narcan—a life-saving drug that reverses the effects of opioid overdoses—management said no.

Tired of management rebuffing their attempts to keep themselves and their patrons safe, AFSCME members asked the health department to organize a union-sponsored naloxone training for library workers and any other members of the community who wanted to attend.

The training sent a clear message to management: Stronger safety measures would be coming to the

Rockford Public Library—and AFSCME members would do it themselves if they must.

Soon after, union members took to the streets before a meeting of the library board to make clear that the establishment of a health and safety committee needed to be in the final contract.

"We took action—effective action," AFSCME Local 3350 president Megan Yordy said. "It wasn't just a picket. We were there to talk about the issues we were dealing with.

We're information professionals. Once the public found out what we were talking about, they said, 'Of course you guys deserve this.'

"We're a female-dominated sector, so people tend to leave us by the wayside," Yordy continued. "It was so great to see this public support come out for us. It's part of the wave of renewed union support we're seeing across the nation. People are thankful for what we do. And when they show their thanks, workers

feel more acknowledged and appreciated."

Library patrons and the broader community stood by their side every step of the way.

"We've been flabbergasted by the public support for us," Yordy said. "Our picket was mostly patrons. A lot of the public came out to the Narcan training."

In the final contract ratified by members, library workers will see their wages rise 23% on average, with some of the lowest paid workers seeing raises of as much as 30%. Employees who regularly translate for patrons will receive an additional \$46 per pay period, and any employee who works more than one Sunday in a month will receive an additional \$25 stipend for each day worked in addition to their overtime pay.

They won a first-ever parental leave policy for birthing and non-birthing employees as well as in the case of an adoption.

And the icing on the cake: They accomplished their highest priority of establishing a labor-management health and safety committee so workers will have a voice in the creation and implementation of new safety procedures.

The Local 3350 bargaining committee included Yordy,

Marie Barcelona, Michelle Dominguez, Erin Stock, Amy Pfeifer, Jean Lythgoe and Janella Harper Herbig, and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner.

NIU workers overcome

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 963, which represents nearly 170 building and food service workers at Northern Illinois University, kept their foot on the gas pedal throughout a year-long contract campaign, taking vigorous action every step of the way. In the end, their efforts paid off, winning a contract that affords them the respect their contributions to NIU deserve.

They spoke out at every meeting of the university board of trustees during the time they were negotiating. With each passing meeting without an agreement, they brought more and more union members out until they dominated the public comment period of the board meetings.

"We are led to believe that the department managers and university labor relations people are in control of this



Members of Local 963 at NIU fought hard for a fair contract—and won.

process, but at the end of the day, it's the board of trustees who signs the contract," said Patrick Sheridan, Local 963's president. "We wanted to go

In the end, their efforts paid off, winning a contract that affords them the respect their contributions to NIU deserve.

straight to the source and put the pressure on them directly. They have the power—and they're the ones who need to address the issues we brought to them."

Local 963 members also made sure the student body was engaged in their fight. The NIU student newspaper covered their actions and spread their message throughout campus. Before and after their work shifts, union members leafletted students to let them know how their university was behaving in contract negotiations.

"Every student we interacted with was disgusted with NIU," Sheridan said. "You don't expect to pay as much as these kids do for tuition, and

then find out the university employees are living on poverty wages."

Their last contract was ratified in 2018—well before the times of COVID and high inflation. At NIU—like many other state universities where AFSCME members work—low wages had become a serious problem and created untenable financial situations for many workers.

For the building service workers who keep the campus buildings in tip-top shape, addressing the decline in university-provided uniforms was also a big issue. The uniforms used to instill a sense of pride, but the university kept cutting corners until their uniforms consisted of nothing but a

cheap white t-shirt—not to mention the university didn't provide jackets, even though building service workers are the ones shoveling snow when blizzards roll through DeKalb.

The result is an agreement that raises wages by a minimum of 20% over the five-year contract. They made significant progress in closing the wage gap between longer-serving employees and new hires.

They also accomplished a number of other important wins, like strengthening overtime and call-in language and establishing more safety training. BSWs came out in the end with an agreement that full uniforms—including winter jackets—will be provided to all employees who need them.

The contract was ratified unanimously.

"It's a really strong contract," said building service chapter chair and bargaining committee member Paul Knigge. "This is the second time I've helped negotiate a contract, and this go-around was far more uplifting and gratifying. We know the members are with it 100%."

The Local 963 bargaining committee included Sheridan, Knigge, Jason Williams, Aaron Sebour, Jessica Brown, Denise Franklin, Adam Harper, Andy Peccarelli, Priscilla Kapraun, Aaron Robertson and Michael Merrill. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Rick Surber. 

Fighting for what's right through the grievance process

The grievance process is one of the best tools in a local union's toolbox. For these AFSCME members, winning grievances meant getting a deserved promotion and recovering back pay owed.

Medical debt discrimination won't stand

Nicole Nowling has served the city of Rockford faithfully as a member of AFSCME Local 1058. For five years, she worked 84-hour weeks as a 911 dispatcher while caring for an elderly mother-in-law and a family.

The stress of the job got to be too much, so she moved to a position in the water department, taking a significant pay cut so she could have more time at home. So when a friend in the Rockford Police Department told her a property and evidence technician job was coming open soon, she jumped at the opportunity and applied.

It's a sensitive job, and required a thorough background check—one she passed with flying colors. She also had to submit to a credit check.

After the lengthy process, she got what she had been dreaming of: an offer letter for the position. She signed it and returned it immediately.

But the next day, management changed their mind. They rescinded the offer, citing two unpaid medical bills which appeared on her credit report—a credit report that they already had when they made the job offer. Suddenly they alleged that outstanding bills were evidence that Nowling couldn't be trusted.

"I was trying to apply for a job that paid a lot better so we would have money to pay that



Nicole Nowling of AFSCME Local 1058.

debt down, and they were denying me the job that would have gotten me out of debt," she said. "Everybody in the union was flabbergasted. It just made no sense."

To challenge such outright unfairness, her Council 31 staff representative filed a grievance on her behalf. When management refused to change its position, the union took the grievance to arbitration.

The arbitrator found that management's denial was

"arguably discriminatory," and ordered the city to reinstate the offer and award her backpay dating back to April 2023.

"The amount of support from everyone in the union was very impressive," Nowling said. "I couldn't have planned a better outcome if I had written it out myself."

Years of backpay coming to many Local 2226 members


AFSCME won't back down. That's the lesson learned from the recent fight for salary justice for members of AFSCME Local 2226, which represents lieutenants in the Cook County Sheriff's Department.

An improved wage scale for lieutenants was due to take effect in 2019 as a result of changes made in the 2017-2020 collective bargaining agreement. When Cook County moved lieutenants to the new step plan, however, it didn't place them on the correct steps. AFSCME

quickly filed a grievance, demanding that lieutenants be moved to the proper steps and paid back pay to make up for the difference.

The dispute went to arbitration in 2021 but, due to illness, the arbitrator did not issue a timely decision. The county and the union reached a settlement in June 2023, but still the county dragged its feet in implementing it.

Local 2226 President Angela Lewis and Vice President Jammell Gunn, along with AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representatives David Dorn and Ralph Portwood, relentlessly pressured Cook County to follow both the collective bargaining agreement and the settlement.

Finally, on June 13—and only after AFSCME had filed an unfair labor practice charge at the Illinois Labor Relations Board—the county agreed to another, very detailed agreement to provide the full back pay to all affected lieutenants within 30 days. Now all AFSCME members have received the back pay they were owed. 

SHORT REPORTS

All safe after fire breaks out at IYC-Warrenville

QUICK ACTION BY EMPLOYEES prevented the worst from happening after a fire began at Illinois Youth Center-Warrenville on July 15.

The blaze broke out around noon in the kitchen of the center's main building, located in DuPage County. Early indications suggest it began as an electrical fire.

IYC-Warrenville, and other state youth centers like it, house youth in custody under the Department of Juvenile Justice. DJJ facilities like Warrenville offer educational and vocational programming, mental health services and substance abuse treatment programs to help improve outcomes for at-risk youth and promote public safety.

55 staff and 34 youth were inside the facility when the fire broke out. One staff member was hospitalized for smoke inhalation suffered while they attempted to battle the blaze and was released later that day.

Members of AFSCME Local 416 who work at IYC-Warrenville responded to the fire quickly by evacuating all youth from the facility.

The facility is forecasted to be closed for several months as repairs are made.

The youth at Warrenville have been transferred to nearby IYC-St. Charles. As of the time *On the Move* goes to print, Council 31 is working to secure a detailing agreement to protect employees who will be moved to that facility while repairs are made at Warrenville.



The aftermath of the fire at IYC-Warrenville.

Area PEOPLE endorsement meetings wrap up

THE STAKES ARE HIGH FOR AFSCME members in the upcoming fall elections, and together we're already charting our path toward victory.

Regional PEOPLE endorsement sessions have just wrapped up. At meetings throughout the state, AFSCME members met together to review candidate questionnaires, interview candidates, and make recommendations for endorsements to the PEOPLE Executive Committee, which will meet later in August.

Regional PEOPLE meetings allow AFSCME members to assess local candidates on the issues that matter the most to them and their coworkers.

Local union presidents and PEOPLE Chairs will come together again at the PEOPLE Endorsement Conference on Sat., Aug. 24 in Peoria to vote on endorsements in judicial and congressional races.

All of this activity is intended to build the strongest possible grassroots outreach effort in support of AFSCME-backed candidates in the Nov. 5 election.

Final endorsements will be printed in the August-September issue of *On the Move* and will be available at

AFSCME31.org immediately following the conference.

Stay tuned for more ways to get involved in helping elect pro-worker candidates up and down the ballot this fall.

Another state employee wage increase effective July 1

AS PART OF THE COLLECTIVE bargaining agreement between AFSCME Council 31 and the State of Illinois, all state employees received a 4% wage increase to base pay on July 1. This follows two wage increases totaling 6.5% during the first year of the contract. State employees will see their base pay raised by 17.95% (19.28% when compounded) over the course of the four-year contract.

Additionally, on July 1 Step 1c was eliminated from the salary schedule. All employees on Step 1c at that time were to be moved to Step 1b.

The July 1 wage increase—and the other important terms of the contract, such as 12 weeks of parental leave and affordable health care—would not have been possible without AFSCME members standing united and demanding fairness during the contract campaign.

The final agreement was the culmination of months of dedicated action by tens of thousands of AFSCME members in state government.

In the weeks leading up to the previous contract's expiration, 14,000 AFSCME 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 stacked them on the bargaining table during the final round of negotiations.

Union win rate climbs higher

IN 2023, THE OVERALL union win rate in elections administered by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) broke 70% for the first time in 15 years thanks to pro-worker, pro-union policies

implemented under the Biden administration.

The win rate for workers who are seeking to form a union in their workplace has hovered around 64% since 2008, but that rate has shot up since 2020. So far in 2024, 73.8% of union elections have resulted in a victory.


The increase in the number of union elections and the higher win rate represent a marked shift from the organizing climate under the previous administration. President Biden has appointed leaders to the NLRB who have taken steps to advance—rather than prevent—worker organizing.

Not only are workers more likely to win their union election, but there are also more elections today than at any time since 2015. The number of union elections decreased from 2017 to 2020 under the Trump administration; however, in the past two years, the number of elections held each year shot up past pre-pandemic levels, reaching 1,777 total elections in 2023.

International Convention: Front Line and Fearless!

EVERY TWO YEARS, THOUSANDS of delegates from AFSCME local unions across the nation get together to discuss issues of vital importance to our communities, our workplaces and our union. Through open discussion of the issues that matter to public service workers and working families, these delegates set our union's priorities, renew shared commitments and strategize to make us stronger.

This year's convention—our union's 46th—runs from Aug. 10-16 under the banner of "Front Line and Fearless" in recognition of the challenges AFSCME members have faced in the last two years and the hard-fought victories we've won.

Convention delegates from Council 31 locals, elected by the members of their locals, will join thousands of their peers in Los Angeles to share ideas, learn new skills and build solidarity. 



AFSCME members at the Region I endorsement session interview candidates for the 2024 primary election.

RETIREE NOTES

Congressional Democrats fight for Social Security boost

A NEW BILL INTRODUCED BY Democrats in Congress aims to make significant changes to how the Social Security Administration calculates cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) that would protect seniors from rising prices by expanding benefits.

Currently, the Social Security COLA is based on the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners (CPI-W), which reflects everyday spending for food, housing, transportation and consumer goods.

Under the new bill, sponsored by Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.) and Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.), the COLA would instead be based on the Consumer Price Index for Americans aged 62 or older (CPI-E), an inflation measure that more accurately reflects the costs incurred by older adults. Medical expenses, an increasing burden on older people, are weighted more heavily in the CPI-E than in the CPI-W.

“Switching to this inflation measure would give seniors much-needed relief from high inflation,” said Larry Brown, president of AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees. “The bottom line is that it’s a much fairer way to calculate COLAs and would result in more money in the pockets of Social Security recipients.”

If passed, the bill would help many older adults afford necessities like food, medication and clothing because current Social Security benefits are not keeping up with rising costs.

“It’s important that the COLA reflects how inflation impacts seniors so that we can pay our bills and our monthly Social Security checks stay effective,” Brown concluded.

Retirees lobby for home care workers

IN MAY, AFSCME RETIREES joined the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans at

the Capitol in Springfield for a rally to demand a \$20 per hour minimum wage for home care workers in the Illinois Community Care Program (CCP).

The CCP is a public benefit program offering in-home and community-based services for qualified senior citizens aged 60 and up as an alternative to premature nursing home placement.

There are 12.1 million hours of home care services that Illinois seniors should receive but don’t because the program is severely short-staffed—and low pay is to blame.

The budget passed by the General Assembly did raise the minimum wage for CCP home care workers to at least \$18 an hour starting January 2025. AFSCME retirees will continue to fight to ensure that those assisting them with home care services are paid a living wage.

Get ready to vote!


SENIORS TURN OUT TO vote in higher numbers than other population groups—9% higher in the last presidential election. It’s the role of every retiree activist to not just vote but to bring as many of their fellow seniors along with them as possible.

Retirees like Herbert Hughey, president of AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 73 in Joliet, know how important it is to register as many voters as possible. He was out with his fellow retirees at Joliet’s Juneteenth Festival to register community members.

“In many countries, the average person still has no ability to elect their leaders,” Hughey said. “Voting should be seen as a privilege that we exercise with pride. We want to maintain our democracy and elect lawmakers that stand up for the working class.”

That sentiment seemed to resonate with many festivalgoers, Hughey said.

There are more ways to vote than ever before, including by mail.

See important voting dates in the box at upper right. 

Important Voting Dates



Wednesday, August 7.....First Day to Apply to Vote by Mail

Starting Aug. 7, any registered voter presently within the confines of the United States may make application by mail or in person to the election authority for an official vote by mail ballot. Please note that mailing and delivery of ballots does not begin until Thursday, Sept. 26.

Thursday, September 26.....First Day of Early Voting

Thursday, October 31.....Last Day to Request Ballot to Vote by Mail

Tuesday, November 5.....Election Day

Voting at polling locations. Mail-in ballots must be postmarked no later than November 5, and will be accepted for a two-week period.

SOLIDARITY DOESN'T END WITH RETIREMENT!



AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees President Larry Brown (right) and Sub-chapter 56 member Bob Wingerter were on the picket line in solidarity with Menard Correctional Center employees on July 8 as they fight for safer working conditions in the Illinois Department of Corrections.



How does your union protect you on the job?

I always wanted to be a part of a union and I'm so thankful for it. Things have improved now, but over time I've seen different phases where things in the city weren't always so great. I kept the faith, and we kept fighting as a union.

We come in as individuals who want to make a difference, who want to see change, who want to make our voice heard in a positive manner. That's where we come in and try to make a difference by talking to them and figuring out what their issues are and what could be improved. That's what we stand for.

I'm now a union steward, but as far back as I can remember, I always went to the union meetings on behalf of others in forestry and would report back to them when they couldn't make it. We all have a part to play.

Donald Blackwood

MAINTENANCE WORKER III
EVANSTON PUBLIC WORKS

AFSCME Local 1891

What do you do as a public works maintenance worker?

We deal with all the regulatory signs and special events, painting and striping the lines in the street, installing pedestrian crosswalks—really anything that has to do with the streets of Evanston. I also plow snow in the winter.

In a few months I'll have been with the city for 24 years. I started first in the forestry department, taking care of the trees in Evanston. Planting, pruning, removing, repairing storm damage—whatever it took. I did 15-and-a-half years in forestry. I excelled. I became an assistant crew leader, I was their on-call guy.

I dedicate my time and sweat to this job because I love it. It's hard work, and it was a hard job to get, but it should be hard to find folks who are willing to be a part of something like this.

What attracted you to a job in public works?

I came to the U.S. from Jamaica 33 years ago, and Evanston is the only place in the U.S. I have lived. I've been drawn to it by virtue of the people and the community. Evanston is a beautiful city and it's a livable city that I've grown to love. I volunteer here. I go to church here. I'm a part of this community. Whatever I do in this city I want to do with pride, and I want to do my best at it, because this is my community too.

Not only does my job provide me with a livelihood for my family, but public works is also something that I love. I love to deal with the residents and the trees. I try to express a smile every day, because I get to go about my business and do this job for the people of Evanston.

How do you fight for your members as a union steward?

We make sure that management knows they have to abide by our contract regardless of the individual. We all have rights. Progressive discipline has to be honored. If we can talk it over, then we wouldn't always have to go to grievance.

As a union steward, I try to mobilize members into action. It's not every time things are going to go our way. And not everyone is always going to be on our side, so we need to take action.

We had a picket a couple months ago about safety and injuries. All of us were out there—that's unity and strength. We were alerting the city to our issues because they weren't hearing us.

I support the union and my local and I also respect where I work. I see the two as one because we have to coexist together in a respectful manner. I know what I have to do: Continue to follow the agreement and remember why we do our job. But management has to do their part too, which is making sure that we're compensated and treated fairly. 🦅