



ON THE **MOVE**



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AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN **HELP IS HERE**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

OUR BONDS
HAVE NOT
BEEN BROKEN

Reconnecting will strengthen solidarity

AFSCME members are ready to rebuild together

Let's Get Together—And Feel Alright. That's the refrain of an old Bob Marley song that's been ringing in my ears a lot lately. It's more or less the opposite of how we've been living for the past year of this global coronavirus pandemic.

In fact, the essence of the strategy to combat the virus has been social distancing—stay six feet apart, don't hug or shake hands, wear a mask over your face (leaving you barely recognizable even to close friends). In other words, let's not get together. So, for the most part, we haven't. And, not surprisingly, we haven't felt alright at all.

Some of us have felt anguished as we've watched friends or family die isolated and alone in hospitals or nursing homes—unable to hold their hands or whisper final goodbyes.

Many of us have been sickened with the virus—sometimes left with a range of debilitating symptoms, including heart damage, muscle weakness, headaches and even psychosis.

All of us have had to radically alter our life routines—and mostly not for the good. We've had younger children trying to learn remotely at home; teenagers missing out on sports, social activities, and graduation ceremonies; and we've had adult children moving back home because they lost their jobs or their colleges closed down. We've had to defer medical treatment, cancel vacation plans, even avoid going to the grocery store.

The need to maintain social distancing hit the labor movement especially hard. Labor solidarity, after all, is the inverse of human isolation. Social connections are what unions seek to create every day. Union stewards are vital social links, connecting employees in their work area.

Local union meetings regularly provide opportunities for members to come together to share concerns and, afterwards, to share a few beers. Union picket lines and rallies enable working people to feel the strength that grows from that unity.

Over the past year, AFSCME Council 31 and local unions throughout the state have worked steadfastly to sustain those bonds. First and foremost, we've organized through every means possible to make sure that employers put in place the equipment and protocols needed to keep union members safe on the job. And we've worked to forge new agreements that provided for expanded time off for those who contracted COVID as well as those with additional family responsibilities.

We've used the remote tools available to us to hold local union meetings, conduct steward trainings, provide members with the facts about COVID, and hold labor-management meetings. We've even managed to hold contract negotiations remotely—and continued to win wage increases and job improvements at that virtual bargaining table.

We've found ways to help and support each other, whether we're working together in high risk situations like correctional facilities or working remotely from home and rarely laying eyes on each other.

Last summer and into the fall we kept up those connections through outdoor activities. But once winter came, we were forced to into greater

isolation. It hasn't been easy to maintain the solidarity that is so essential to our progress. In fact, it's often been hard and frustrating. But we did all that we could—and while those bonds may be frayed, they have not been broken!

Now with the advent of COVID vaccinations—and the arrival of spring—we see the potential to reconnect and rebuild. We're making plans to get together, whether at meetings, pickets, picnics, or parties.


We know that social distancing is still needed—and masks too! But we also know that as more and more of us get vaccinated, those restrictions will gradually be reduced. Already the CDC has determined that vaccinated friends and family can get together, even indoors, without distance or masks. And that can go for our union family too.

That's why it's so important that every union member gets vaccinated as soon as possible.

Many of us are in very tough contract negotiations that will require direct action—and we're going to be prepared to take it.

Others are faced with measures in the current session of the General Assembly—as well as city councils and county boards across Illinois—that can help or harm us. So we're going to need to rev up our grassroots lobbying program too.

No doubt we have a long way to go before we will return to the electrifying energy of a packed rally or the easy pleasures of a party at a crowded union hall. But we are most definitely on our way. We can all do our part to strengthen union solidarity by acting now to get vaccinated and encouraging our coworkers, family and friends to do the same.

And when those days finally arrive, we will all be able to get together—and feel alright! 



ON THE MOVE

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For Illinois, Biden's "Rescue Plan" means help is here

Provides aid to families and fiscal relief to state, local governments

On March 11, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act into law. This COVID-19 relief legislation provides significant new resources to fight the pandemic, help working people and families, aid states and local government and jump start the economy.

"This measure is a remarkable achievement that will shore up our middle class and help the most vulnerable in our communities while ensuring our state and local governments can meet the needs of their residents," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "We can be proud of the part AFSCME played in securing these sorely needed investments. As usual, our union never quit until the job was done."

Throughout the past year, AFSCME members generated calls and letters to Congress and the White House urging the nation's leadership to "Fund the Front Lines." When the previous administration and Senate majority tried to walk away from their responsibility to the American middle class, AFSCME organized and

mobilized, helping elect President Biden and end Mitch McConnell's barricade of the legislation in the Senate.

"This is a historic victory for public service workers and working families across the country," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "Among many other things, this landmark legislation will deliver families a vital economic lifeline in the form of \$1,400 checks, protect health care coverage for those who have lost their jobs and invest in the public services we need to finally crush this virus."

Help is here

The following summary describes some of the key parts of the law of importance to AFSCME members.

For hard-hit workers and families:

- Individual adults with income of \$75,000 or less (or two-adult households with income under \$150,000) will receive a stimulus payment of \$1,400, as well as \$1,400 for each dependent. This targeted relief is expected to benefit 85% of all Illinois adults and 83% of all Illinois children.
- Extends federal unemployment programs through September 6, which affects 205,000 Illinoisans claiming Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and 251,000 Illinoisans claiming Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.
- Up to \$10,200 in unemployment benefits will be exempt from federal income taxes for hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans that have claimed unemployment insurance benefits in 2020.
- Lowers health premiums on the Affordable Care Act for the average Illinois couple by \$1,300.

- Employees who lose their health insurance coverage due to involuntary job loss or a reduction in hours are eligible for a federal subsidy that covers 100% of the premium for COBRA continuation coverage from April 1 through Sept. 30.
- The Rescue Plan includes a very significant one-year expansion of support for children and dependent care. The 2021 maximum child tax credit is increased from \$2,000 to \$3,600 for each child under 6 and \$3,000 for children ages 6 to 17. The increases in the maximum begin to phase out for heads of households making \$112,500 and married couples making \$150,000.
- The 2021 maximum dependent care tax credit, which offsets the cost of care for children under 13 and other dependents, is increased to \$4,000 for families with one child and \$8,000 for those with two or more children. It reimburses families for up to 50% of the cost of child care expenses.

To avoid drastic budget cuts at every level of government:

- The American Rescue Plan will provide some \$13.2 billion in flexible, direct aid for Illinois state government, cities and counties to help cope with the revenues lost due to the pandemic in a time of rising demand for vital public services.

In the battle against COVID-19, emergency aid is increased:

- Provides some \$275 million in vaccine distribution money for Illinois.
- Includes \$1.5 billion for testing.
- Adds public health money for Illinois health departments.
- Invests hundreds of millions in Illinois community health centers and health workforces.

Continued on page 14

Illinois General Assembly in session

Legislators consider bills, budget plan despite COVID restrictions

The 2021 legislative session of the Illinois General Assembly is in progress, as legislators meet virtually and in person to consider new laws and pass a state budget in unprecedented and trying times. As always, AFSCME's lobbying team is in the thick of things to stand up for the interests of working people.

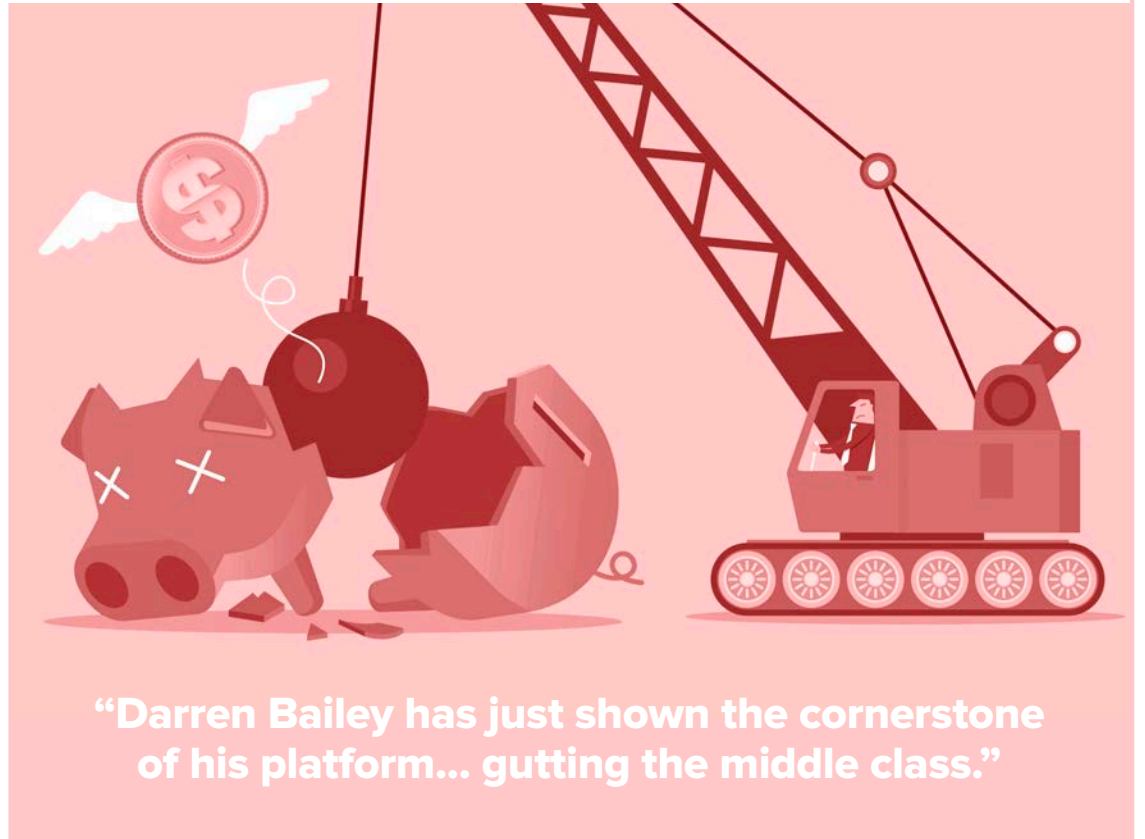
Governor JB Pritzker's proposed budget for the 2022 fiscal year provides Illinois with a path forward—maintaining vital services and battling the coronavirus pandemic while meeting the state's pension obligations. And help has arrived through federal funding from the much-anticipated American Rescue Plan Act (see page 3).

But there is still work to be done. The General Assembly must pass a budget and it must include new revenue. AFSCME supports Pritzker's proposal to close tax loopholes for big corporations.

"Profitable corporations should not get tax giveaways when so many working people

have lost their jobs and are struggling to pay their bills," said Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. "The very same entities that crusaded to defeat the Fair Tax amendment must take responsibility and pay their fair share."

Despite the challenges posed by meeting remotely and less often, legislators have still managed to introduce more than 6,800 bills for consideration in this session. It will undoubtedly be difficult to give serious attention to anything close to that number, but AFSCME lobbyists are supporting, opposing and tracking more than 400 bills that impact union members.



Union lobbying efforts

AFSCME is supporting a wide range of legislation that will help union members, including a "no-cuts" FY 22 state budget, closing corporate tax loopholes, summer unemployment

insurance for school district and university employees, an increase in funding for wages for workers in community disability agencies, easing of FOID card requirements in IDOC, and restricting privatization of public water systems.

Unfortunately, there are also dozens of bills that would harm AFSCME members. Union lobbying efforts are focused on defeating bills such as elimination of qualified immunity for peace officers, reducing or eliminating public employee pension benefits, mandatory COVID vaccinations, and attempts to limit expansion of public services or restrict revenue options.

Legislator seeks to dismantle pension systems


Illinois State Senator Darren Bailey, a Republican candidate for governor, is leading the charge to abolish the state's constitutional protection for public employee pensions.

Illinois employers have failed to meet their pension obligations, causing a massive deficit, while working people have consistently paid their share toward their promised retirement benefit. AFSCME has fought to protect union members' pensions all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court—twice—winning a landmark decision in 2015 affirming that public employee pensions are protected by the state constitution.

"The one, perhaps the only, thing that has prevented lawmakers over the years from completely decimating [public employee] pension funds—from ignoring their commitments in exchange for the brief fleeting rush of political expediency—has been that constitutional protection," said an editorial from Springfield news radio station WMAY. "That alone has kept the irresponsible impulses of generations of elected officials from being even worse in practice. And Senator Bailey, candidate Bailey, wants to do away with that."

"Darren Bailey has just shown the cornerstone of his platform for Governor: gutting the middle class," Illinois Democratic County Chairs' Association President Kristina Zahorik said in a statement.

What's worse, Senator Bailey says that he's putting forward this legislation to "uphold the promises" the state has made. That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, he's trying to break a core promise.

"Illinois has made commitments, and it should keep them, not just because the state is legally required to do so, but because it is morally obligated to do so," WMAY concluded, "rather than opening the door to breaking those promises and punishing the people who have actually kept up their end of the deal." 

Visit the Council 31 website for a complete listing of bills in the current legislative session that AFSCME supports or opposes.

LOCAL ELECTIONS BRING SOME GOOD NEWS

Local government makes a difference in all our lives, from providing basic city services to valuing the people who provide those services. That's why AFSCME works to help elect local officials who will stand up for working families.

Despite some disappointments, there were some very good wins to celebrate on Election Day, April 6, 2021. The majority of candidates endorsed by the AFSCME PEOPLE program won their races in the primary and general consolidated local elections, including two AFSCME members.

AFSCME Local 46 member Tracy Pugh was the top vote-getter in his race for the Rock Island/Milan School Board. "I promise that I will work hard for the students and make sure all of them are given a great opportunity for a future," he said.

"Even with the ongoing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, our team found ways to campaign safely and effectively," said AFSCME Local 2025 member Amy Beeding, who was re-elected to her seat on the East Moline School Board District #37. "Support from the AFSCME community in the Quad Cities was very helpful!"

In a political upset, the entire slate of AFSCME-backed candidates in Moline won their races, including newly elected mayor Sangeetha Rayapati and four aldermen.

"Once again we can thankfully say 'the people have spoken,'" said Pat O'Brien, newly elected Ward Six alderman. "When labor engages the voters on issues for the wellbeing of the community, we all win."

"Moline city employees were watching their services be outsourced," said Tracy Jones, AFSCME PEOPLE Chair in the region. "There was a calculated campaign to recruit a full slate of candidates and the entire ticket won! That's what can happen when people come together and work hard towards a common goal."

Find election results for AFSCME-endorsed candidates at AFSCME31.org/Election.

COVID vaccines offer a shot of hope

More than three million Americans vaccinated daily

Illinois has vaccinated more than 4.1 million residents against COVID-19, bringing the state closer to stemming the spread of the virus that has infected more than 1.2 million residents, killing 21,000.

The Pritzker administration expanded eligibility to all “government workers” effective March 22, allowing all public employees to schedule an appointment to be vaccinated, including state workers from every agency, city and county employees, and employees of universities, school districts, park districts, housing authorities and any other public body.

Light at the end of the tunnel

“The vaccine is the most potent weapon we have in the battle to halt COVID transmission and begin to restore so much of what we value in our daily lives,” said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “Vaccination is truly a lifesaver. That’s why it’s so critical that all of us take advantage of this new opportunity to get vaccinated now. Don’t delay in

making the call or going online to make your appointment.”

AFSCME members at local health departments throughout Illinois have been part of COVID-19 education and mitigation since the start of the pandemic. Now they’re part of ending it, by organizing and facilitating vaccination clinics, ensuring communities get access to the vaccine, and even administering the vaccines themselves.


AFSCME Local 1028 member Cathy Lawrence, a registered nurse who has worked at Will County’s health department for 28 years, volunteered to help the vaccination effort.

“I stepped up because I really believe in the importance of people getting the vaccination,” she said. “My heart aches for all those people who have lost friends and family members. That’s why I’m happy to be a part of this.”

Lawrence said the county has set up vaccination clinics

VAX FACTS:

- ✓ The vaccines are extremely effective at preventing infection and illness from COVID-19, which has sickened millions of Americans, killed more than half a million, and left many more with lingering, sometimes agonizing, after-effects.
- ✓ There are now three vaccines available: Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.
- ✓ All three vaccines have been proven safe in rigorous clinical trials and given FDA approval.
- ✓ Fully vaccinated people can enjoy more freedom.
- ✓ In public spaces or at larger social gatherings, people should continue to protect themselves and others, including wearing masks, physical distancing and washing hands often.



VISIT [AFSCME31.ORG/VAX](https://www.afscme31.org/vax) FOR MORE INFORMATION

that have administered the shot to anywhere from 400 to 1600 people a day.

“It’s so well-organized. We have a very large volunteer base helping out, including medical and non-medical personnel,” she said. “Even though we’d been through the H1N1 pandemic, we’ve never had do anything like this, and I think

we’re doing a good job for the people of Will County.”

President Biden announced on March 25 that he was doubling his original goal of vaccinating 100 million Americans in his first 100 days. With the U.S. vaccinating more than 3 million people daily, the president vowed 200 million Americans will have the protection of

a COVID-19 vaccine by April 30.

People are starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel, Lawrence said. “It’s been so long, but now our elderly neighbors are vaccinated and I’m hopeful we can get everyone vaccinated before too long. It’s great to be a part of the solution. People are just so happy to get it.”

RANDY HELLMANN, LONGTIME CHAMPION FOR WORKING PEOPLE, TAKEN BY COVID-19



Our union has lost a widely respected Council 31 staff member and brother in the struggle for workplace justice, Randy Hellmann. Over three decades, Randy served on the executive board of Local 203 at Centralia Correctional Center, was president of AFSCME Local 943 at Pinckneyville Correctional Center, a member of the Department of Corrections Standing Committee

and Council 31 Executive Board, and—most recently—Council 31 Staff Representative in central and southern Illinois.

After more than four weeks on a ventilator fighting for his life, Randy died of COVID-19 on March 13. He had contracted the virus just two weeks shy of his scheduled vaccination. And even as he was being put on a ventilator, he was thinking of others, urging the union to tell his story to help encourage every member to get vaccinated as soon as they possibly can.

“Randy was deeply devoted to AFSCME and committed to the core to the members he served every day,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “He never faltered in the fight, no matter how difficult the challenge, always buoyant, determined, and strategic, always

lifting up all those around him.”

“Randy was the embodiment of solidarity, reaching out across every boundary that might divide us,” Regional Director Eddie Caumiant said. “He mentored so many local union leaders and inspired so many members.”

Hundreds of Randy’s fellow union members expressed their sadness at his passing on the memorial the council posted online, calling him “a great friend” who “always looked out for the little guys.” Others said “Randy always acted in the best interest of the membership” and “he was always there when we needed him.”

“Words cannot express the sorrow that so many of us all across this union feel on his passing,” Lynch said. “We can honor him now by heeding his call to get vaccinated and do our part to help stop the spread of this deadly virus.”

AFSCME is the union for library employees

Library workers rising to challenges of pandemic era

Like so many public service workers, library employees are navigating uncharted waters during the coronavirus pandemic. AFSCME-represented library workers are faithfully advocating for policies to foster safety and encourage wellness in their workplaces. At the same time, they're joining together to advocate for financial security for members while trying to meet the needs of their communities.

AFSCME represents more than 3,000 library employees in communities throughout Illinois, more than any other union. Nationwide AFSCME represents more than 25,000 library workers in more than 350 public and private libraries.

Keeping doors open

"Welcome to Your Library" was the theme for this year's National Library Week, April 4-10. Fitting to the challenge facing our public libraries, the American Library Association's goal of the week was "to promote the idea that libraries extend far beyond the four walls of a building."

The ALA said every library has addressed the challenges of the pandemic in different ways, "going above and beyond to adapt to our changing world by expanding their resources and continuing to meet the needs of their users. Whether people visit in person or virtually, libraries offer opportunities for everyone to explore new worlds and become their best selves through access to technology, multimedia content, and educational programs."

That's never truer than at libraries where AFSCME members are working to protect employees and patrons alike while continuing to provide critical services. Some Illinois libraries remain closed except for curbside pickup, but most are now open to the public in some form with various safety measures in place.

"They need us and we're here," said AFSCME Local 1215 President John Rayburn, a supervising clerk of circulation at Chicago Public Library. "Libraries are the cornerstone of every neighborhood."

AFSCME advocated to include library workers in vaccination Group 1b to ensure early

access to the vaccine for library workers whenever possible. As of March 22, all library workers became eligible for the vaccine, thanks to a policy by Governor Pritzker to guarantee access to the vaccine for all public employees.

AFSCME Local 1891 member Kim Daufeldt is a librarian in Evanston. She thinks her local union's biggest accomplishment was protecting livelihoods during the pandemic.

"Our union was the reason we got paid when the library was closed, even those whose jobs could not translate to working from home," she said.

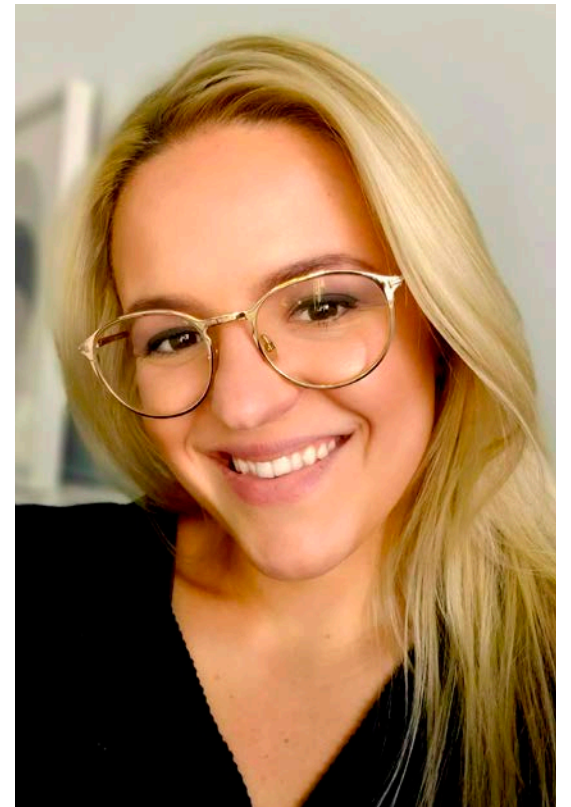
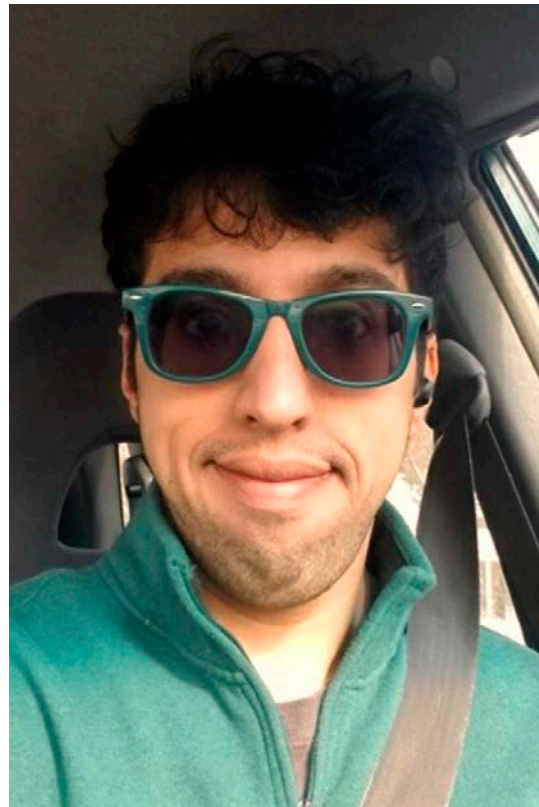
The union difference

According to data from the Public Libraries Survey, AFSCME-represented Illinois municipal libraries invest 51% more in staff salaries and 114% more in benefits. Overall compensation for AFSCME-represented library workers is 63% higher than non-union libraries.

That union difference has helped spark a nationwide movement to organize by library employees. Council 31 has most recently established new library locals in Homewood and Oak Lawn.

"Library employees are the heartbeat of our library and community," said Lisa Stilts, Local 1618 president at Homewood Library. "We organized our union so we would have a real voice and a seat at the table to participate in decisions and make the best library for our co-workers, our community and ourselves."

"Library workers need seats at the table more than ever right now," said Abbey Davis, Council 31 Organizing Director. "Without a union, management has the power to make all the decisions. With



AFSCME represents more than 3,000 Illinois library employees, including (clockwise): John Rayburn at Chicago Public Library, Adam Curran at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Aleksandra Podraza at Elk Grove Village Library and Eric Guzman at Oak Lawn Library.

"The solidarity that comes with a labor union provides protection and peace of mind. Now more than ever, we see how important that can be."

a union, library workers get a chance to stand up for each other, together."

"We want to speak up for ourselves and the services we provide to the community," explained Eric Guzman, a library assistant in Oak Lawn, where the recent organizing drive was part of a broader national campaign to provide a voice through AFSCME for

employees at museums, libraries, zoos, planetariums, and other cultural institutions. AFSCME's Cultural Workers United is the first major campaign to unify and uplift cultural workers in the labor movement.

"I don't feel alone among my co-workers," said AFSCME Local 3783 member Aleksandra "Al" Podraza, a youth services

librarian in Elk Grove Village. "I know that each of us has a voice and we are stronger together, as a union."

"The solidarity that comes with a labor union provides protection and peace of mind," said AFSCME Local 805 member Adam Curran, site interpreter at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. "Now more than ever, we see how important that can be." 🦋

If you know someone at a museum, library or other cultural institution interested in forming a union at their workplace, email organize@afscme31.org or call Organizing Director Abbey Davis at 800-260-0717, ext. 4376.

AFSCME members take up remote work

Meant to stop spread of virus, arrangement has other benefits for employees

A year after the COVID-19 pandemic forced employers to shut down and send employees home, millions of Americans are still working remotely, including thousands of AFSCME members. One question many are asking now that an effective vaccine has arrived: What's next?

Council 31 sent an informal survey to members doing remote work to learn what they consider the challenges and benefits of working from home. The feedback was largely positive. While there are challenges to remote work—several cited missing their co-workers—many respondents expressed hope that they would be able to continue to work remotely when the pandemic ends.

AFSCME has already begun discussions with the state and other employers about expanding that option for union members.

Omar Dugay

Executive 1 SS

Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services | Local 2600

"The biggest challenge was getting everything set up correctly, but after that, there were no other struggles. Internet speed at home is much better and my productivity has more than doubled due to the system working better and faster. The biggest benefits of working remotely for me and my family have been not worrying if our children are OK—because we're home with them—and being able to help our children with school work on breaks and lunch. I am a happier, healthier employee working from my home."



Robin Johnston

INEP WPP, University of Illinois Extension Services | Local 3700

"We have been working remotely for one year [as of] today. My biggest challenge is getting

campus supervisors to understand the rural technology and outreach difficulties during COVID. I have few distractions while working alone from home—unlike the office."

Lori Brannan

Aging Specialist

Illinois Department on Aging | Local 805

"The biggest challenge was not being able to train in person. As a trainer, I rely on seeing the faces of the class. It helps me to know that they are getting the information and learning. It is harder to provide the training by webinars. After doing the remote training for

the past year, I have adapted to the platforms we use. I care for my elderly parents and was very concerned about their health. Now, they are fully vaccinated, and I have peace of mind knowing that they are safe from COVID-19. I'm very lucky to continue to do my full job by working from home."



John Kjellquist

ITHD Help Desk Manager, Illinois State Police | Local 1964

"Getting all my operators connected to VOIP phone system to work remotely and checking

in before and after shifts has been a challenge, but 24/7 scheduling is easier. Morale is higher. Fewer sick days have been used. I did not think we could move a critical 24/7 public safety help desk with eight operators off-site. But we did! And never missed a beat."

Polly Mowry

Executive 1, Illinois Department of Corrections | Local 1964

"It's a challenge not having all the proper tools at home to do my job efficiently. I understand we all have to do our part to keep others safe, however, with us being a small office I think we could be in the office more."

Maria LaMothe

Program Analyst, City of Chicago Dept. of Family and Support Services | Local 1669

"Working remotely has given me the opportunity to work at my own pace without the distractions and pressure at the office. I can prioritize and manage my workload. I feel I am more efficient working remote."



Justin Sheehan

Social Services Career Trainee Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services | Local 2600

"I have been remote since Day One with the state, so I received all my training online. It was a little intimidating not being able to turn around and simply ask someone a question when needed. However, with the use of Microsoft Teams, Webex meetings and emails, it has been a much easier, smoother process than anticipated!"

Reylin Dimayuga

Environmental Protection Engineer III Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Local 1019

"Adjusting and adapting to the situation was a challenge—with no readily available materials or equipment to work from home. Also, with remote working, we are using the Citrix Workspace which sometimes becomes a hassle

because of technical difficulties but not really a deal breaker. I discovered that there was a good balance and effect for me to be able to work and be at home at the same time ... that I'm accomplishing something in my job while also having time for myself and my family, among many benefits."

Wendy Smith

Human Services Caseworker Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services | Local 2600

"The biggest challenge was not getting to meet my coworkers face-to-face when I started this new position during the pandemic. [But] there are a number of benefits, both professional and personal. I feel that my productivity is increased as there are fewer interruptions than in an office environment. And personally, I am home more for my family since I am not commuting an hour and 15 minutes each way every day."

Clark Wright

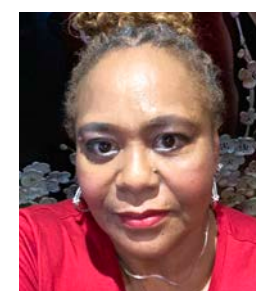
RTS II, Illinois Department of Revenue | Local 997

"It's difficult not having access to regular office equipment and mail services. But there is less stress, less time spent getting ready for work and commuting. I have a better, more ergonomic work station with fewer distractions. I'm just as—if not more—productive remotely and I have overall better mental and physical health."

Cassandra Morrison

Recruiter, City of Chicago Department of Human Resources | Local 2912

"Working longer days and getting in touch with my operating departments has probably been the most challenging. But I feel more productive at home and feel that I make better use of my time since I'm cutting out the two hours of commuting time each day. I am less stressed even on the days where I work over a bit. Working from home has allowed me to be more focused as I do not have all of the interruptions that you normally have when in the office. I feel like my overall health has benefited from working remotely as well."



Sandra Davis

SSPP IV, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services | Local 805

"I transitioned into this position on the day COVID shutdown began,

so most of my training was virtual. I also began cancer treatment on that same day. I've been able to work through chemo. Thanks to my wonderful supervisor, team and administrators, a mountainous challenge was reduced to a speed bump!"

FRONTLINE HEROES DESERVE FAIR PAY

AFSCME members saved lives, urge lawmakers to raise wages

Direct service personnel (DSPs) at community disability agencies across the state have made steady progress in raising wages in their sector through solidarity and grassroots education of lawmakers in Springfield. The workers have made a clear case that low wages have created a hiring crisis that undermines the quality of community care for people with developmental disabilities in Illinois.

“The General Assembly heard their voices and has increased funding for these agencies for four consecutive years, amounting to over \$3.00 more per hour for DSPs,” said Council 31 Regional Director Doug Woodson. “The median wage at AFSCME-represented agencies is 12% higher than the statewide median wage for all community disability agencies. That’s the union difference.”

Now AFSCME is launching a new effort to increase wages. The union is pressing for passage of House Bill 2752 in the current legislative session which would provide a \$2 per hour wage increase for DSPs.

AFSCME local unions have to bargain to ensure state funding increases go to frontline worker wages. Part of the union’s lobbying effort is emphasizing the importance of codifying in law that any increases go directly to raising wages. That language is included in HB 2752.

The lobbying campaign will look a little different. Without the ability to travel to the Capitol in person, AFSCME members will meet with legislators via Zoom and are organizing phone-in days as well.

The stories these frontline heroes will share are more compelling than ever. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, DSPs and other direct care staff have made enormous sacrifices, putting their own health—and that of their families—on the line to keep the individuals they serve safe and to care for those who are sick.

Many have worked for days or weeks on end, staying on the job 24 hours a day—effectively sheltering in place with their residents—to prevent bringing the deadly virus into their facility. These workers are the embodiment of public service, yet they’re not paid enough to make ends meet.

As a society, we must do better. That’s where AFSCME comes in: Together, workers can improve their lives by making their voices heard. 🦋

“I was pregnant during most of 2020 with a baby girl and had two boys at home. There was never a moment that I didn’t worry.”



Linda Green

Local 2399, Broadstep, Freeport

We are the backbone of our company. For the hands-on work that we do with the clients, and being around staff we may not know well, we’re taking a risk. The money should be put into the DSPs’ pockets instead of the company’s pockets, but we’ve had to fight our employer for the money we helped get from the state.

If we don’t get language in the legislation requiring that funding for wages goes to us, the companies will get the money and use it for something else and not give us a dime of it. That happened once before.

The biggest problem is getting good people into the workforce who want to do this work and take the job seriously. This is my job and I care about what I do. I care about the individuals because they are a reflection of me.



Marlon Thomas

Local 486, Aspire and Bellwood Developmental Center, Bellwood

At the beginning, there was such fear, this virus was out there hurting and killing people. But it was hard to even get proper PPE from management so the workers could do their job. Then 90% of the building came down with COVID, both

staff and residents. Thank god we didn't have any deaths.

People aren't making enough to take care of their families. It's always been a struggle, but the pandemic made it even worse. Members will work a whole week without seeing their family or kids to bring in extra money to feed them.

It's sad that in this field we have to fight just to get a fair wage when it should be freely given. Someone has to stand up and say this is wrong. We must do better when it comes to direct care. We should not have to work two jobs, do double shifts, just to put food on the table and keep our lights on. It's still not enough.



Angelica Muffick
Local 38, Pathway, Springfield

I was pregnant during most of 2020 and I had a baby girl in December so I had to be extra cautious. There was never a moment that I didn't worry about giving it to the baby or my two boys at home. It was so scary.

Before we became a part of AFSCME, we had a really difficult time. They weren't giving COVID leave pay; you were on your own for two weeks if you got sick or exposed. Then AFSCME came and fought for 10 days' paid COVID leave. We bargained all of 2020 and then our first union contract went into effect with AFSCME. It's been night and day. We've seen so many actual changes. It made such a big difference.

It's been extra hard because our individuals haven't been able to go out. They used to have day program, school, that they could go to during the day. It's still closed. That's got to be the most difficult thing, for the individuals and for us. You can't blame them for having difficult behaviors; you have to be really understanding and patient.

My individuals are why I'm in this job. It broke my heart because we lost a couple people to COVID. They are the reason that you keep going.

"It's rough right now; we're down a lot of people. They're choosing to work elsewhere. It's been rough on the individuals we care for too."



Roosevelt Journigan
Local 2690, Trinity Services, Joliet

It's a demanding job and you put your all into it. You have people's lives and well-being in your hands. So we have to keep fighting for better pay. Look where we've gotten so far because we never gave up: We went from \$8.50 an hour coming in the door and now it's more than \$12. We can't quit now.

It's rough right now; we're down a lot of people. They're choosing to work elsewhere. It's been rough on the individuals we care for too. For a year they've been shut in. It takes a toll on them; people are exhibiting behaviors they haven't done for years. They don't know what to do. They don't know what's going on.

I'm so glad the vaccine has arrived. It gives us some hope. It wasn't looking good for a while there, but things seem to be on the right track now.

I love this work. When I came to Trinity, I was just biding time to figure out what I wanted to do. I ended up staying for 30 years. I guess you could say I'm good at it. It came naturally to me. And you gain skills working with these people here. They've taught me just as much as I've taught them. I've learned patience and understanding. I consider them my family. I was talking about retiring and they said, "If you leave, you have to take us with you."



Jackie Long
Local 1268, Kreider Services, Dixon

Since the pandemic, all our job duties have been disrupted. Everything's changed. We've had to wear masks and goggles and

constantly worry about someone bringing COVID into the home. Clients want to see family members, but they can't. It's emotionally and mentally hard on the clients and the staff.

At one point we had 30 minutes' notice that we were changing from 8-hour shifts to 12-hour shifts, and working on different days, for about two months to cover homes because of short staffing. People with kids didn't have child care, they couldn't cook dinner for their families. Kids would call their moms at work, crying because she wasn't coming home. It disrupted our whole lives.

We're the essential workers on the front lines who are scared and don't want to catch COVID or the clients to catch COVID. We should be compensated for that.

Working together we collected 140 signatures on a petition to management about why we are essential and deserve a good contract. When we went to bargain, we got the best contract we've ever had. We increased wages, benefits, vacation time, sick time, attendance policy, and got money invested in longevity. Anybody working as a DSP deserves it.



James Sitati
Local 4008, Little City, Palatine

Before COVID showed up, people were working crazy amounts of overtime just to make ends meet. Our industry has a lot of overtime because of the high turnover and it was exacerbated by COVID. There are more staff shortages because people are out sick with COVID or in contact with COVID. But the clients still have to have the same level of service, 24 hours a day.

Working 40-60 hours of overtime takes a toll on you physically, mentally and emotionally. That's how you make mistakes. You don't have a way to channel that extra stress by taking a day off or doing activities with your family. The burnout rate is really, really high.

I really feel for my co-workers who have young kids. You leave your second shift at 11pm and pick up the kids half-asleep at the babysitter's, then wake them up early to go back so you can make it to work on time. On breaks you're FaceTiming so you can talk to them before they go to bed. Mommy or daddy is always at work.

We've been extremely encouraged by how AFSCME has really gone to the mat for DSPs. Without our union there's no way we'd have the voice that we now have. And I believe we can achieve more going forward. 🏹

SHORT REPORTS

WHAT THE PRO ACT WOULD DO FOR WORKERS

- **Ensure Consequences for Lawbreaking Employers**

The National Labor Relations Board could fine companies up to \$50,000 per violation for retaliation, such as firing workers who start union campaigns.

- **Compensate for Retaliation**

The bill would provide additional compensation for damages workers experience when companies retaliate against them for organizing.

- **Affirm Employee Status**

Gig workers (e.g. Uber drivers) would be reclassified from contractors to employees, giving them more rights, including the right to form or join a union.

- **Strengthen Bargaining Rights**

Employers would be required to bargain in good faith and unable to permanently replace strikers.

Pro-union PRO Act would empower workers

THE PROTECTING THE RIGHT to Organize (PRO) Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives on March 9 and is now before the Senate.

The AFL-CIO calls the act the “most significant worker empowerment legislation since the Great Depression”: It reforms private sector labor law to give power back to workers so they can freely organize unions.

If nearly half of Americans said they would join a union if they could (PBS NewsHour poll, 2017) and 65% of Americans approve of unions (Gallup poll, 2020), why do less than 12% of Americans belong to a union?

“It’s likely because they can’t,” said New York Magazine. “Fortunately, a possible fix awaits: The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act

would mark the biggest expansion of collective-bargaining rights in decades.”

The PRO Act prohibits retaliation by employers against workers seeking to form a union and gives authority to the National Labor Relations Act to fine and penalize employers engaging in such unfair labor practices.

“The PRO Act would help unrig the system and neutralize unscrupulous employers who use coercion, intimidation tactics and retaliatory threats against workers trying to organize,” AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. “You shouldn’t fear for your job simply for exercising the right to band together in the workplace.”

President Joe Biden has voiced his support for the PRO Act and is ready to sign the bill. However, it’s expected to meet opposition from Republicans in the Senate.

In the House, the bill passed with bipartisan support. But while in Illinois, 13 Democratic representatives

voted for the bill, the five Republicans—Mike Bost, Rodney Davis, Adam Kinzinger, Darin LaHood and Mary Miller—all voted against it.

“We will continue to organize and mobilize on this important issue as it moves to the Senate,” said Tim Drea, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO. “With an income equality gap at a record high and an economy that increasingly leaves people behind, empowering workers to join together, bargain for a fair return on their work and hold employers accountable has never been more important.”

President Biden agrees and is ready to do something about it.

“I believe every worker deserves a free and fair choice to join a union—and the PRO Act will bring us closer to that reality,” President Biden said. “I urge Congress to send it to my desk so we can summon a new wave of worker power and create an economy that works for everyone.”

Earn a bachelor’s degree for free

THERE’S GOOD NEWS FOR AFSCME members looking to pursue higher education: AFSCME Free College has made its bachelor’s degree completion program a permanent benefit.

That means that AFSCME members and their families can earn a bachelor’s degree for free, making an even wider choice of career options a possibility for more people.

Central State University (CSU) in Ohio is now offering five degree completion options in partnership with AFSCME: business administration, early childhood education, education intervention specialist, criminal justice and interdisciplinary studies/humanities (for people who have earned previous college credit in a variety of subject areas).

In order to begin the bachelor’s degree program at CSU, students need to have earned an associate degree or 60 credits with a 2.2 GPA. Almost 1,400 union members or their family members have taken advantage of this free, flexible opportunity through the bachelor’s degree completion program.

Just like the free associate degree through AFSCME Free College, the bachelor’s degree program is conducted exclusively online, making it tailor-made for those who work full time.

For AFSCME members

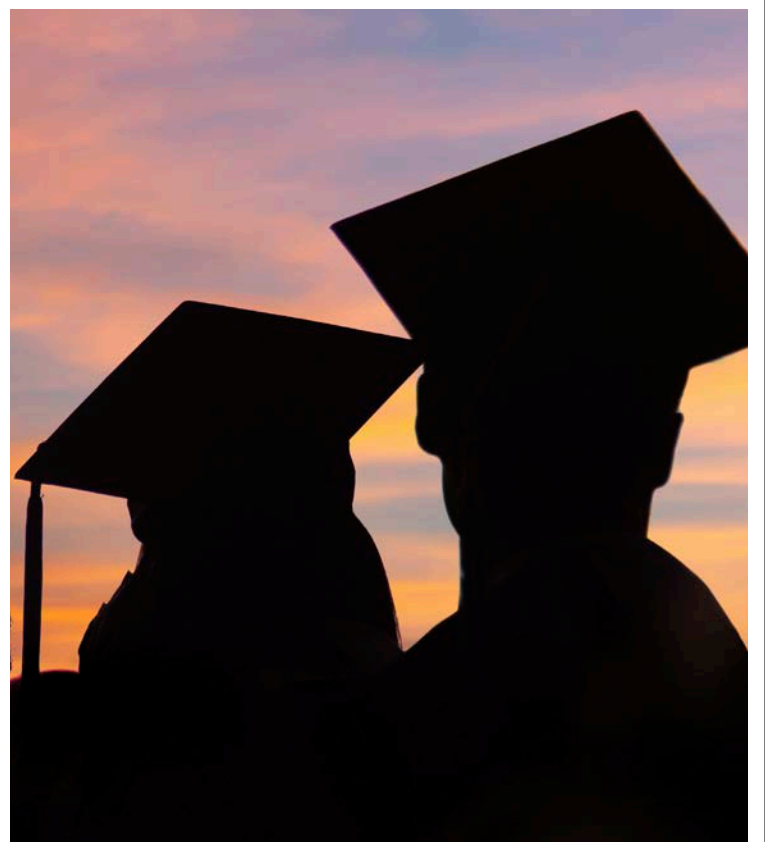
and their families who have not yet earned an associate degree or do not have 60 credits in hand, AFSCME’s Free College through Eastern Gateway Community College is a great pathway to earn a free associate degree and then be able to transfer to CSU.

More than 20,000 AFSCME members or their families have taken advantage of the associate degree option, pursuing education in areas ranging from social work to accounting to criminal justice and more.

Students who pursue EGCC’s business management degree program may now earn a specialized certificate in a wide variety of disciplines, like finance, hospi-

AFSCME members and their families can earn an associate’s and bachelor’s degree for free.

tality, cyber security, health care management and more. Certificates are awarded after successful completion of four specialized courses in the subject area. This helps students to demonstrate transferable skills and knowledge of an in-demand area of study to current and future employers.



AFSCME Free College is open not only to union members, but retirees and family members of union members, including children, spouses, siblings and others.

Visit freecollege.afscme.org or call (888) 590-9009 for more information.



Jack Matthews joins SERS Board of Trustees

AFSCME LOCAL 1964 PRESIDENT Jack Matthews will join the State Employees Retirement System (SERS) Board of Trustees after being the only candidate who submitted sufficient signatures for election.

Matthews—whose local primarily represents central Illinois employees in the Department of Corrections and the Illinois State Police—joins Stephen Mittons of AFSCME Local 2081, David Morris of AFSCME Local 805, and Tad Hawk of AFSCME Local 1805 on the board.

Shaun Dawson, president of AFSCME Local 2073 at Logan Correctional Center, is stepping down from the Board in July after four years of steadfast advocacy on behalf of state employees.

Public employee pension benefits have been under attack for years and it's more important than ever for union members to have a voice on the SERS board. Of the 13 members of the board, four are elected by participants in the fund, while two are elected by annuitants.

AFSCME has worked hard to ensure that both active and retired trustees are individuals firmly committed to protecting the integrity of pension benefits.



Springfield implements paid leave

TWO YEARS AGO, AFSCME members helped elect one of their own, Local 805's Erin Conley, to the Springfield City Council. Now she's helping to make a positive difference in their lives.

Conley fought to pass a landmark policy for the city providing four weeks of paid parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child for all employees. The ordinance was approved with a 6-4 vote on March 17.

"This is us investing in our people," Conley said. "Our employees are the ones who make the city government work [so] we want them to be their best at work and we want them

to have a life at home. Everyone deserves that."

AFSCME members in Springfield helped make the policy change by telling their stories and advocating for the ordinance in the media.

AFSCME Local 337 member Tanner Fry is expecting his third child in September. He argued that ensuring paid leave for dads as well as moms is an important issue for gender equity.

"A lot of the burden falls on the mom, and it's unfair," Fry said. The ordinance "gives us dads an opportunity to be a part of the beginning stages. Trying to take care of the baby and [our other two children] while she's recovering from everything her body just went through, I just can't imagine how difficult that would be."

The United States is one of

the only developed countries without nationwide paid parental leave. Only one in five workers in the private sector has the benefit, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and

"This is us investing in our people. Our employees make the city government work."


just one in four in the public sector.

AFSCME members at the State of Illinois secured 10 weeks of paid leave for state

employees in their most recent union contract and many local unions are working to add the benefit to their contracts.

"We took a vote to support our employees, to support families and do this in a way that's meaningful," Conley said after the vote. "I am proud the city of Springfield is taking a leadership on parental leave. I hope other communities follow this example because this is the way it should be."

It's also an example of how elections have consequences. When she took office, Conley said, "I can't put a price tag on what the union has done for me. It has completely changed what I thought my life would be and I will always be grateful. This union gives so much to me and I want to give back to others."

With parental leave, she's keeping her word. 

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Nurses win respect at Loretto Hospital

MORE THAN 100 REGISTERED nurses at Loretto Hospital in Chicago have been taking care of their community for years. Their service has been especially exemplary over the last year as the city's West Side was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The people who work here want to give quality care to this community. That’s why we’re here.”

But despite working diligently, these members of AFSCME Local 1216 didn't have the tools they needed to succeed. The hospital was chronically short-staffed, with about 20% fewer nurses than it needed.

What's worse, Local 1216 President D Sutton said, was that “the administration was giving us a difficult time. We didn't feel respected and we



AFSCME Local 1216 members celebrate ratification of a hard-won contract. Pictured left to right, RNs Twana Rodgers, D Sutton, Nicole Jordan and Clementine Forson.

didn't feel appreciated.”

The difficulty of the job paired with low wages and poor treatment from management caused many nurses to find

other positions, Sutton said.

“The people who work here want to give quality care to this community. That’s why we’re still here,” Sutton said. “There

has to be some appreciation for people who want to stay through the difficult parts. We told each other, we don't have to be quiet about it, we don't have to just take a beating. The union is here for that. Let's bargain and get what we need to do our jobs.”

That's what they did. After months of negotiations, the bargaining team reached an agreement with Loretto management that dramatically restructures the way the hospital works. They won wage increases while also creating a 20-step salary progression to reward longevity.

Sutton, a behavioral health nurse, was joined at the table by union stewards and fellow nurses Sandra Weeks, Mafa Jean Louis, Dvonya Wilson and Harold Grubb. The team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Rick Surber.

Sutton said she was most proud of the team's ability to finally get the administration to listen to their concerns. What tipped the scales during negotiations, Sutton believed, were the harrowing examples the bargaining team shared of what it means to be working short-staffed while trying to save lives.

“That was a big turning point,” she said. “They realized how serious we were. They didn't understand the gravity of the situation.”

In the end the team won a four-year agreement with the raises and step plan, plus new paid time off for union activity, float pay, two new floating holidays, and pay differentials for flex nurses and certain shifts. The membership overwhelmingly ratified the new contract on March 8 and 9 in socially distant settings.

Sutton said solidarity is what helped them prevail. “We have the strength and backing of our fellow members,” she said. “They can step in and give you that shove when you feel it's useless, so you keep persevering. That's what being union is about.”

Rolling Meadows members make gains

AFSCME Local 1919 members won their second union contract, ratifying it overwhelmingly in February.

The local represents 30



AFSCME Local 1919 bargaining team members removed their masks for a photo: Kelly Vlieger, Debbie Rybarczyk, Anne Irsay and (not pictured) Ryan Rivard.

employees who work for the city of Rolling Meadows. The bargaining team included Anne Irsay, Ryan Rivard, Debbie Rybarczyk and Kelly Vlieger and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Lange.

Together they secured a three-year contract with 6.25% in cost-of-living increases over the term of the agreement. They expanded bereavement leave for part-time employees and reduced the scheduled work day from 8.5 to 8 hours for the majority of members with no loss of pay.

“We’re very excited about our contract,” said Irsay. “Our first contract was good but there were a lot of gray areas. A lot of it was open to interpretation and we found the city was interpreting it in their favor. Our goal was to have everything be more black-and-white.”

One issue was compensatory time. Instead of receiving time-and-a-half for overtime, employees wanted time off. But the city threatened to eliminate this benefit, saying the contract wasn’t clear.

The bargaining team fought to secure a very clear and fair comp-time use and accrual policy in the contract, including the ability to roll some of that comp time over to the following year.

Irsay is a community service officer who has worked for Rolling Meadows for 15 years. As a relatively newly organized

unit, she said there is a clear union difference.

“The aldermen were talking about eliminating full-time positions in favor of part-time positions with no benefits and no pension,” she recalled. “When we unionized, that stopped all that talk at the council meetings. We were able to save our full-time positions.”

Being union provides security and protection that doesn’t exist for at-will employees, she said.

“Being an AFSCME member is about everyone being treated equitably and fairly across the board. It keeps everybody on the same plane; it eliminates favoritism. It keeps things on the up-and-up. There is a contract, and they need to abide by it. I find security in that.”

Solidarity in action in DeKalb County

AFSCME LOCAL 3537 HAS three union contracts with DeKalb County—one for employees of elected and appointed officials, one for employees at the health department and one at the DeKalb County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

During negotiations for a one-year contract, the county offered employees at the

nursing home a 1% raise—after offering the other units 2%.

These nursing home employees have been battling to save lives—their own and those of the residents—throughout the pandemic, caring for some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Approximately 50% of the home’s residents and 75 staff contracted COVID-19; 12 residents died.

“It’s despicable that AFSCME members who put their health and safety at such great risk were offered half of what everyone else was offered,” Council 31 Staff Representative Lori Laidlaw said.

The entire local refused the 1% offer on behalf of the nursing home unit. Then the county offered 1.5%. Again, the union said no. They demanded that every employee receive the same raise.

And they won.

“We fought until we got the respect for nursing home workers that the rest of the county workers were granted,” Local 3537 President Chuck Coulter said. He was joined on the committee by fellow member Chuck Simpson, with support from Laidlaw.

“We have too much pride in our work to accept anything less than what everyone else got, and as long as I have air in my lungs I will fight for our members,” Simpson said.

The contract was unanimously ratified on March 23.

Hard-fought win for Peoria County employees

AFSCME LOCAL 3586 MEMBERS at Peoria County have been through the ringer.

The nearly 150 employees reached a tentative agreement with the county in February 2020. The county

“Everyone hung together. We were able to keep fighting.”

board considered it just days after the statewide shutdown. In a panic, the county rejected the contract in an unprecedented move, sending the local back to the bargaining table at an incredibly uncertain time.

Local President Kevin Kennedy, a juvenile probation officer, said he’d never seen a situation quite like this in his 30 years of service.

“We all understood that everything had changed, but we negotiated for nearly nine months on this deal and we finally got it done,” he said. “We had an agreement with decent cost of living raises. But when we restarted negotiations, that was all taken away. Their

proposal was basically nothing: zero, zero, zero.”

The local could not accept that, especially since these employees were contributing so much to the county during the pandemic.

“A lot of people worked nonstop with the public, putting themselves in danger, and did a great job,” Kennedy said. “Other employees volunteered to take furloughs and went on unemployment to help the county weather the fiscal storm.”

So Kennedy and fellow bargaining committee members Kim Schilling, Jill Hoover, Myles Davis, Jeff Howard and Felicia Whitlow went to work, led by Council 31 Staff Representative Tim Lavelle.

Negotiations continued throughout 2020, with the bargaining team trying to make gains for the local, which includes employees at the offices of chief judge, auditor, circuit clerk, coroner, county clerk, recorder of deeds, sheriff, state’s attorney, and treasurer. They finally had to seek federal mediation in January 2021.

In the end, their determination was rewarded. The team negotiated a \$1,000 signing bonus for 2020, a 2% increase in 2021 and another 2.5% in 2022. They also secured an extra personal day.

“Everyone hung together,” Kennedy said. “Through perseverance on our part we were able to keep fighting, keep working hard and we got the deal done.”



AFSCME Local 3537 members at DeKalb County stuck together until they won a fair contract for employees at the DeKalb County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Corrections employees' mental health strained by pandemic

AFSCME's Personal Support Program is here to help

If you feel your mental health has suffered during this pandemic, you're not alone. The ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—including stress, illness, death, isolation and an economic recession—have taken an enormous toll on mental health in America and globally.

More than 42% of Americans reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in December 2020, up from just 11% a year earlier. And a majority of people who already suffered from these mental health challenges

reported exacerbated symptoms. Filled prescriptions for depression and anxiety drugs reached an all-time peak in 2020, according to a GoodRx report.

Public service workers are

struggling perhaps more than others, working on the front lines in jobs directly related to coronavirus mitigation or in congregate settings with high-risk populations like aged veterans, individuals with disabilities or prison inmates.

Corrections staff face challenges

Two years before the pandemic, a 2018 study from the University of California-Berkeley found that 38% of correctional officers reported feelings of depression and hopelessness,

with 10% having thoughts of suicide.

These numbers can only have increased over the last year when conditions in prisons were even more isolating and stressful.

"The first five to six months was the hardest part," said AFSCME Local 2073 President Shaun Dawson. "Staff were isolated at work and when they went home, because they were in such close contact with offenders who are COVID-positive. We always say never take work home with you, but this past year has contradicted all of that. Every day was a worry."


Dawson said the pandemic changed the overall mood of every facility for both staff and offenders. Inmates in lockdown lacked what little contact they might have with family. As a result, volatility increased and mental health skated a razor's edge.

"The worst thing you can do if you're depressed, concerned, agitated or upset is isolate," Dawson said. "My father passed away and we couldn't even have a funeral for him. It's the same for all of us: Your entire world is being completely turned upside down."

work-related issues like interpersonal conflict or stress on the job.

The union-based employee assistance program expands AFSCME's tradition of service to those it represents by providing professional counseling and support to individuals and families experiencing personal and life changes.

Access to PSP services is an employee benefit that the union seeks to incorporate into collective bargaining agreements whenever possible. The program has become a trusted resource for AFSCME-represented employees and their dependents who work for the City of Chicago, Cook County, the State of Illinois and several other employers throughout the state.*

"We need to be able to say to ourselves and our co-workers that it's all right to say you're struggling, to say there's a problem and to ask for help," Dawson said. "Some of the strongest people are those who asked for help and were able to move forward in a positive direction. It's been a long year but hopefully things are getting better." 

** Besides State of Illinois, City of Chicago, and Cook County employees, members of the following locals are also covered by PSP: L347-Village of Round Lake Beach, L3905-Village of Fox Lake, L2891-Village of Homewood, L3780-Egyptian County Health Department, L2402-Randolph County and L726-City of Pana.*



PSP provides short-term counseling that's confidential and free.

For help, call 800.647.8776



PSP can help

AFSCME Council 31's Personal Support Program (PSP) provides short-term counseling that's confidential and free, as well as referral services for a range of concerns including parent-child or marital conflict, financial problems, grief and loss, depression, anxiety, and

RESCUE PLAN

Continued from page 3

• The act also modifies and extends the emergency paid sick and paid family leave tax credits that were first passed in 2020. The new law does not require that any employer provide leave, but it does expand access to tax credits for leave provided voluntarily to employees.

To strengthen our education and human service infrastructure:

• Provides more than \$7.5 billion in aid for Illinois K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and early

childhood education/child care providers.

- Provides more than \$100 million for mental health and substance abuse treatment efforts in Illinois.
- Illinois will receive hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for homeowner assistance to provide homeowners with direct help with mortgage payments, as well as funds for emergency rental assistance to help renters with unpaid rent, utilities, and other housing related costs.
- Extends 15% SNAP benefit increase through September 30, 2021, which would help 2 million people in Illinois, and increases the WIC benefit.

- Extends the Pandemic-EBT feeding program through next school year, to support one million children in Illinois who are not able to access consistent meals at school.


Physical, social and technological Infrastructure:

- The new law creates a Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund which will provide \$100 million to Illinois for critical capital projects.
- The plan provides financial assistance for rural hospitals and facilities to cover health-care-related expenses and lost revenues attributable to the pandemic.
- Provides funds to libraries and museums to implement

public health protocols, increase broadband accessibility and fund payroll costs.

- Estimated \$1.5 billion in transit funding is directed to the Chicago region which will help fund operating expenses and payroll for frontline workers of the CTA, Metra, and Pace through 2023.
- Some \$380 million for Illinois airports is included as part of the \$8 billion for airports and airport concessions in the bill.
- Includes over \$7 million for Illinois state veterans homes.
- The new law also includes several provisions that affect employers and state UI programs, including \$2 billion for state unemployment IT systems upgrades focused on fraud prevention, equitable access and timely payment of benefits.

Disaster Relief:

- Allocates \$50 billion to replenish FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, which provides COVID-19 assistance to Illinois at a 100 percent federal cost share.
- Provides \$300 million in firefighter grants, including \$200 million for SAFER grants to increase emergency personnel staffing, and \$100 million for Assistance to Firefighter grants to for fire departments to purchase equipment and resources.
- Provides \$400 million for FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program, which funds nonprofits helping households that are experiencing, or at risk of, food insecurity or homelessness. 

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Retirees are taking their shot to stop COVID-19

The three vaccines now available are proven safe and effective at preventing COVID-19 in those over age 65. That's why AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees like Eric Kenney (Sub-chapter 87) are taking their shot. See page 5 for more information.

Pensionomics

DEFINED BENEFIT PENSIONS are a significant driver of the U.S. economy, according to "Pensionomics 2021," a new study by the National Institute on Retirement Security.

Pension benefits create a ripple effect in our economy.

The study found that retiree spending of pension benefits in 2018 generated \$1.3 trillion in total economic output, supporting nearly seven million jobs across the nation. Pension spending also added nearly \$192 billion to government coffers at the federal, state and local levels.

"Pensionomics 2021" calculated each state's economic benefit stemming from state and local defined benefit pension payments and provided key state-level results of the economic impact analysis.

Pension benefits received by retirees are spent in the local

community, creating ripples through the economy. Each dollar paid out in pension benefits supports \$1.62 in total economic activity in Illinois.

Each dollar "invested" by Illinois taxpayers in the pension plans supported \$4.86 in total economic activity. Protecting defined benefit pensions is therefore not only important to those receiving the pensions, but also to the Illinois economy at large.

AFSCME backs Tilden in SERS annuitant trustee election

"IT IS VITAL THAT WE RETAIN John Tilden as our representative on the SERS Board in the State Employees' Retirement System annuitant trustee election beginning May 1," said Larry Brown, president of AFSCME Illinois Retiree Chapter 31.

"John has proven himself a strong advocate for working people and a staunch defender of our pensions. We must now flex our voting muscle to ensure he is able to continue that work." An experienced SERS

trustee with more than 50 years of public service, Tilden served the State of Illinois for nearly 40 years as a counselor and psychologist. After retiring, he helped establish an AFSCME sub-chapter in Lake and McHenry Counties because he knows the importance of retirees having an active voice in the

"John Tilden has proven himself a strong advocate."



decisions that affect them.

"At a time when attacks on public pensions continue unabated, it is essential to

have someone with John's experience and dedication to defend our retirement security," Brown said. "As a SERS Annuitant Trustee, John Tilden has focused on ensuring that the pension system remains healthy into the future and being responsive to the needs and concerns of members."

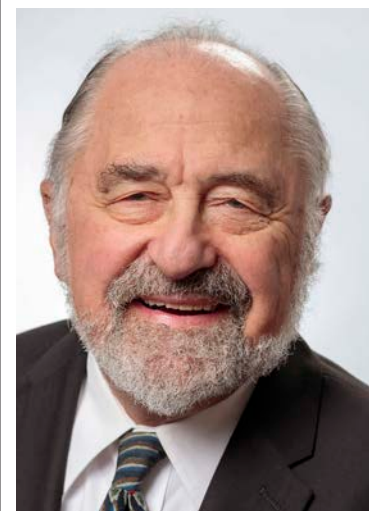
SERS retirees will receive a trustee election ballot from SERS in the mail the week of May 1.

"Watch for your ballot, mark your vote for John Tilden and return it right away," Brown urged.

Re-elect Mitch Vogel as SERS annuitant trustee


ANNUITANTS IN THE STATE University Retirement System should have received a notification from SERS that voting is open for the annuitant trustee election from April 1 to May 3. AFSCME is urging members to re-elect Mitch Vogel as annuitant trustee.

"AFSCME Council 31 is supporting Vogel because his experience and expertise have



served SERS annuitants well in his 12 years as trustee," said Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe.

Vogel is a retired professor at Northeastern Illinois University. He served as president of the University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100 of the American Federation of Teachers for more than 17 years and was vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

Materials with instructions on how to vote were sent to annuitants from YES Elections. In addition, SERS will be sending out periodic reminders about the voting process. Ballots must be returned no later than May 3. 



ful ways. You can say, 'Let's go to the store—what letters do you see on this box of your favorite cereal?' That way it's fun and not a power struggle.

What have you learned from your career?

I have learned to be kinder to myself. I've learned that it's OK to have bad days. It's OK to have struggles. It's important to acknowledge those struggles but know that you're not a failure. You just need to persevere. You're not going to succeed all the time, but you'll have the opportunity to learn and do better or try something else next time. Everybody makes mistakes.

It's the same way we approach discipline—we assume positive intent. If a child is acting up, it might be because they have had a bad day, or if a parent has [a difficult] attitude, it's because they care about their child. It makes your life happier if you assume a positive intent about yourself and others. Assuming the opposite will tear you down.

How does your union improve your work and the services you provide?


Being union has improved our working conditions, increasing our salaries and making our health insurance less expensive than it would be without a union. That makes the job more attractive to quality teachers—and longevity is a plus to both the employee and to management. It's such a huge cost to train new people and there is so much to learn in Head Start.

Why are you active in the union?

What got me interested in being a steward is I would hear people complaining, and I thought I would be someone who does something. I wanted to have a say. If you don't do the work, you really don't have a right to complain. In negotiations, I know what management starts with and where we end up; if the membership saw how far the difference was between that and the outcome, people would be a lot happier and more appreciative.

Without a union, decisions would be made without as much consideration for employees. Head Start funding is grant driven. Those grants can be written in a way to provide more money for management or for employees. If there wasn't a union, employees would be less of a priority. The wages would be lower. Health insurance would be higher. You could be fired for no reason, there'd be no protection. And if we had less to offer employees, we'd have a lower quality program for the children.

How does it feel to be recognized for your hard work?

When I got the news, I felt utter shock. They were considering so many talented, wonderful teachers across the whole state. I'm so honored. My grandma paid for my last two years of college and I just wish she were still with us so I could tell her about this news in person. My mom said grandma knows. 

Jennifer Feeney

Illinois Head Start Association's 2021 Teacher of the Year

Chief Steward, AFSCME Local 900B

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY HEAD START

Tell us about your job as a Head Start teacher.

COVID has been a big change. Being a virtual teacher involved making videos to give families the freedom to view them at any time instead of having to miss a live zoom call. We did virtual field trips where I'd "take" the kids to a beaver dam or to the grain elevator in Ivesdale. I tried to make it interactive, so the kids weren't just watching but felt as if they were joining in on the experience.

A lot of my job is relationship building, with the children, the families and my co-teachers. We try to help the parents be a part of their child's education. We have homework activities each week. During a normal year, we have book mentors that come in to improve literacy opportunities for the families.

What's your inspiration to go to work every day? What keeps you motivated?

My favorite part of the job is the relationships you build with the children. You have the chance to see children become comfortable with you and share the things they're excited about and watch them grow. All the neurons that are connecting and the wiring going on in the brain at this age is so incredible.

I also really enjoy the fact that every day is different. One class was really interested in dirt, so we talked about how rocks are weathered down and crunched Oreos pretending we were the forces of weather. Or you'll have a class that's really interested in trees. There is so much opportunity to learn new things and it's challenging. What works for one child won't work for another child, so you're constantly learning and trying new strategies and techniques.

I have the most amazing teaching team. I love the collaboration aspect of the job.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

We are giving parents a place where they can know their children are safe, cared for and loved. They're going to have healthy meals and be held and encouraged throughout the day. They're going to get to experience things they might not have the opportunity to do at home for whatever reason.

With a background in early education, you can teach parents things about the growth and development of children they might not otherwise know. That helps strengthen them as a parent. We can introduce new ways of teaching at home. Instead of learning letters and numbers by sitting down and copying, you can teach in interactive and meaning-