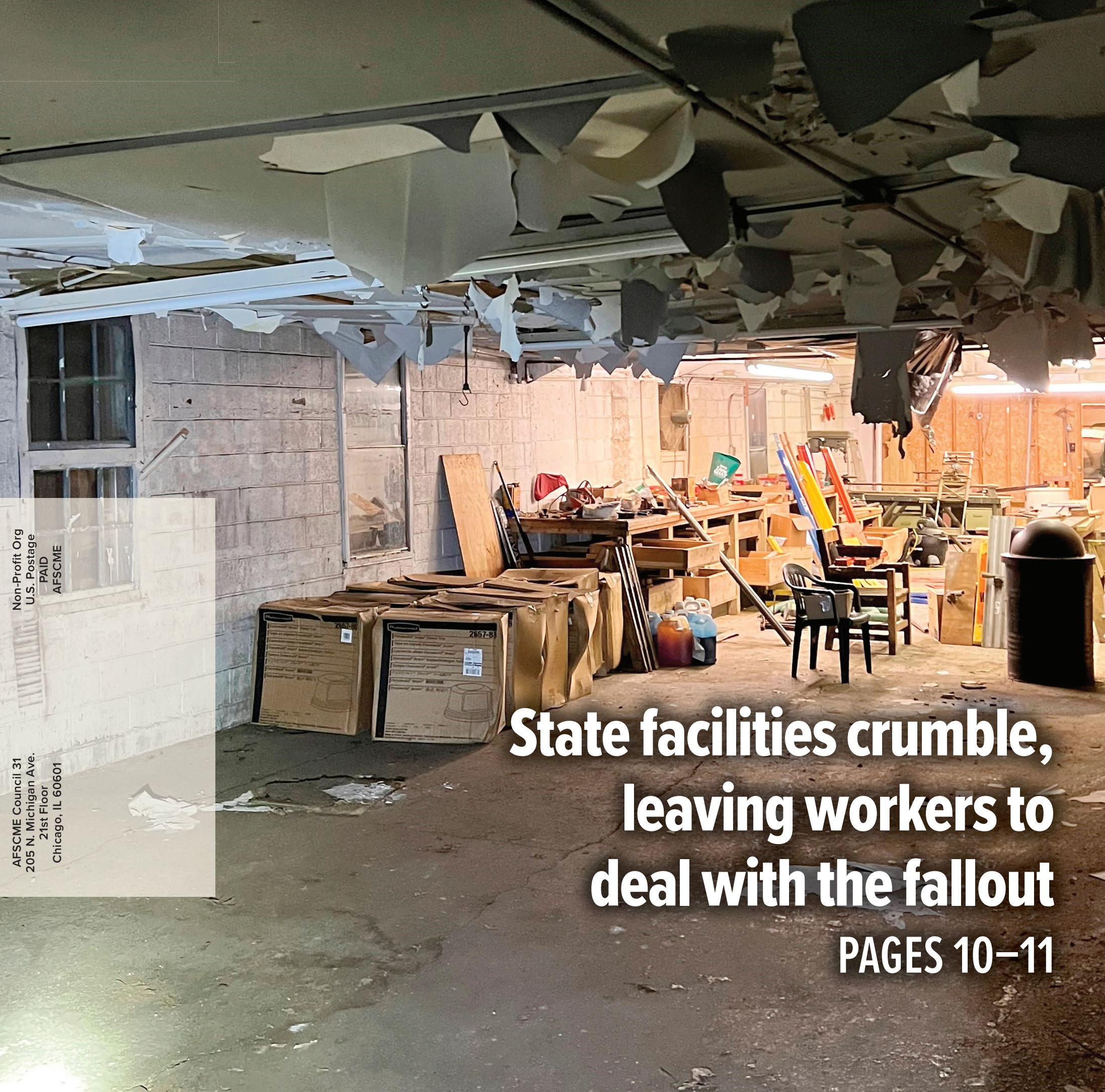


ON THE

MOVE



**State facilities crumble,
leaving workers to
deal with the fallout**

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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

It's striking

Workers are demanding a bigger slice of the pie



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE'RE DETERMINED TO GAIN THE RESPECT WE DESERVE.

As I write these words, faculty at the University of Illinois at Chicago have just walked off the job, effectively shutting down the entire campus. Throngs of these union members are out on the picket lines on this first day of their strike for fair wages.

Increasingly we are seeing that employees in every sector and every type of work are finding that the only means they have to gain what they deserve is to go out on strike: Hundreds of AFSCME members at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; thousands of nurses at two major medical centers in New York City, and tens of thousands of grad students at the University of California. All just in the past year.

And then there are the hundreds of thousands of UPS drivers and packers who've already begun strike preparations even though their negotiations won't start till later this year.

In fact, a new study found that strikes in the United States increased by 50% from 2021 to 2022.

What's driving this increase in what's being termed "labor militancy"? The answer seems pretty simple to me.

First, of course, it is about wages. The galloping inflation of the past few years has taken a big toll on workers' purchasing power. And the cost of some of life's most basic necessities—like housing—has risen even faster than consumer goods.

Employees who've been content with modest wage growth over the past decade are finding themselves falling behind, with a deep unease about whether they will be able to recapture lost ground.

At the same time that working people of all stripes are being told to make do with just a little more than what they had before, those at the other end of the economic ladder are, put simply, raking in the dough.

The rich just keep on getting richer—much, much

richer. A new report from the Congressional Budget Office indicates that the concentration of wealth among those at the top of the income scale has been steadily rising over the past three decades such that we've now arrived at the moment when the top 1% owns more than one-third of the country's wealth.

While it's true that public employees don't work directly for the Ken Griffins or Jeff Bezos of the world, we do work for elected officials who all too often do their bidding. When public bodies plead poverty in the face of union contract demands, it's fundamentally because our entire system of government funding, i.e. taxation, is distorted by the influence of the uber-rich.

With no worries ever about the cost of anything, this wealthy elite continues to have an oversized influence on economic policy—particularly tax policy. Just a small 2% income tax on family wealth over \$30 million would generate enough new revenue to address our country's most pressing social problems. But these wealth warriors oppose even the most modest of tax increases. Recall the millions that Ken Griffin poured into defeating the 2018 ballot initiative in our state to introduce a small measure of progressivity into the Illinois' tax structure.

So, yes, working people are going to demand a bigger share of the pie that the wealthy have been gobbling up for far too long. But wages are not the whole of the story in explaining the marked increase in strikes.

The New York nurses were striking for more staff given the enormous stress that understaffing places on them every day. The U of I faculty

are demanding better access to mental health services for their students. The art museum staffers were concerned about affordable health care. And, of course, we all recall the almost strike (blocked by the federal government) of railroad workers who were fighting for paid sick days.

In other words, it is very likely a convergence of concerns—inadequate wages, unsafe working conditions, inferior benefits—that precipitates a strike. And, often, underlying all else, is a fundamental demand for respect—respect for the work we do, for the toll it takes, for the sacrifices required.

This is especially true as we continue to deal with the myriad challenges posed by the COVID pandemic. In so many instances, the great risks that employees took in the initial phase of this public health emergency are mostly ignored by employers—seldom appreciated, and too often not even acknowledged.

The lesson many employees have taken from that experience is this: If the employer doesn't value us, then we must certainly value ourselves!

The power of that self-affirmation is great. Most union members, including many AFSCME members, had grown used to waging aggressive contract campaigns that include pickets and other forms of protest, but stopped short of actually going out on strike.

Now there is a simmering anger that is propelling us forward. We know the wealthy elite in our country do not deserve their boundless riches. And we know we deserve more than the "getting by" wages and benefits that we currently have.

We're not looking to start striking every time we hit a roadblock in contract negotiations, but we are going to consider striking as a real option when that roadblock becomes a brick wall. We're determined to gain the respect we deserve and the fair treatment that is essential to our future. That's a path forward that can build better lives for us and a better future for our country.

Workers fight to keep county nursing homes public

Once an affordable option, county nursing homes keep getting sold to profiteers

In 2019, the Champaign County Board voted to sell its public nursing home to a for-profit company, University Healthcare, and the company promised to operate the nursing home until at least 2028 and continue to care for the existing residents of the home.

It took less than three years for University Healthcare to try to break that promise. After failing to find a buyer that would continue to operate the nursing home, in late November, University Healthcare announced its intention to abandon the home and sell the land it sits on.

The sale of the Champaign County Nursing Home is just the latest example of an alarming trend that has been creeping from one county to the next.

Illinois' county-owned nursing homes are in jeopardy. As of October 2022, there were only 17 county nursing homes remaining in Illinois, down from 21 in 2015, according to the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

America's population is aging. Over the next 40 years, the number of Americans aged 65 or older will nearly double. Some number of those millions of new senior citizens will need round-the-clock care, and when

the median cost of a private room in a nursing home is more than \$100,000, private options are unrealistic for many middle-class families.

AFSCME members who work in county nursing homes have had to fight to keep their nursing homes from falling into the hands of greedy corporations. County boards are increasingly looking for ways to offload the homes in their counties by selling them to private, for-profit companies, with dire outcomes for the seniors who depend on those homes and the workers who care for them.

Members of AFSCME Local 3537 have been on the front lines of the fight to keep their county nursing home in DeKalb County in public hands. Despite their best efforts and after waging an emotional campaign, the DeKalb County Board voted in October to sell the nursing home to a for-profit corporation, Illuminate HC.



AFSCME members at Walnut Acres picket to keep their nursing home public.

"Our home has been operating for well over 160 years," said Chuck Simpson, a restorative aide at the DeKalb County Nursing Home and president of Local 3537. "We were always self-sufficient. The county never used to give us any money, and whatever money we made we reinvested it into the facility. Somewhere along the line, the money was mismanaged, and the wheels just fell off the bus."

Employees of public nursing homes are covered by public sector labor laws in Illinois, but when ownership is transferred

residents of the home are still worried about whether the company will make good on that promise.

"The residents like the union, and they are always asking about what's going to happen to us," Simpson said.

When a nursing home operates on a for-profit model, data show that the level of care declines while profits go through the roof.


Illuminate HC had overall quality ratings of "below average" or "much below average" at 75% of the other nursing homes it operates and aver-

they try to do so by making workers 'more efficient.' What this means is that workers' efforts, stamina, and attention is dispersed. Activities meant to stimulate the mind, bodies and skills of the residents go by the wayside. Excess mortality goes up."

AFSCME members have had success saving other county nursing homes. In November, workers at the Randolph County Care Center successfully campaigned to keep their nursing home open through a public referendum.

In Winnebago County, workers have staved off the privatization of the Walnut Acres Nursing Home. In June, a resounding 76% of Winnebago County voters backed a referendum to increase property taxes by \$25 per year to keep their beloved nursing home in public hands. But the Winnebago County Board has dragged its feet to implement the tax increase that voters asked for.

At county board meetings and ballot boxes across Illinois, workers and community members have made their voices clear: what few public nursing homes remain must be protected from falling into the hands of corporations.

"What's most important is to keep fighting for what's right," Simpson said. "We need to fight for the workers, yes, but the reason that we're all here is because of the residents. We're fighting for them too." 

"The reason that we're all here is because of the residents. We're fighting for them too."

to a private company, workers lose the protections of those laws. An employer could refuse to honor the existing union and force them to start the unionization process from scratch.

DeKalb County officials scoffed when AFSCME presented a memorandum of understanding to the board that would have required Illuminate HC to commit to recognizing Local 3537's union even after the sale becomes official. Simpson said that new ownership has privately given them assurances that they will recognize their union, but workers and

aged 17.5 health citations per facility during its most recent inspections, more than double the national average. A quarter of Illuminate-operated homes have been flagged for abuse.

"When these county nursing homes are sold to private entities, workers previously employed by the public to care for all seniors regardless of income are now employed by a firm that is solely focused on maximizing profits," said Council 31 Director of Public Policy Jacob Meeks. "Because the nursing home industry focuses on maximizing profits,



Members of Local 3537 at an April meeting of the DeKalb County Board.

DSP wage increase campaign set to kick into high gear

Momentum from past wins will fuel progress

A FSCME members who care for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities in community agencies are ramping up for a wide-ranging, concerted effort to get wage increases through the state budgeting process.

These nonprofit agencies are almost entirely dependent on state government to fund their operations. For years now, AFSCME members have organized to lobby state lawmakers to pass appropriations that provide for much-needed wage increases. After a brief hiatus due to the pandemic, the campaign for fair wages for direct support professionals (DSPs) is about to kick into high gear once again this spring.

In Illinois, more than 27,000 people with intellectual or developmental disabilities live in community residences and rely on DSPs to assist them with daily tasks, from personal hygiene care to teaching essential life skills.

For many DSPs, the work

is gratifying, but can be physically demanding and emotionally draining. On top of the challenging environment, low wages force some DSPs to look elsewhere for work—which hurts them and the people they care for.

Community disability agencies are woefully understaffed. Veronica Lea, an independent living coach at Trinity Services in New Lenox and the secretary-treasurer of AFSCME Local 2690, said that recently she and her colleagues have had to work double shifts, sometimes seven days in a row, just to make sure the people they care for have their needs met.

“We basically live where we work,” Lea said. “We go with our residents to doctors’



DSPs from across the state pose in front of the state Capitol during the successful 2019 campaign.

appointments, help them shower, run learning programs, take them on outings. We do that on a daily basis. Sometimes we’re so short-staffed that you have one person doing all that, taking care of six or seven people.”

AFSCME is planning meetings with legislators in their districts and a DSP Lobby Day at the State Capitol this spring where DSPs can meet face-to-face with their legislators to educate them on why it’s in the state’s best interest to give them the wage increases they deserve.

Over the past five budget cycles, Illinois has increased

funding for community disability services by 52%. Because of AFSCME’s efforts, DSPs and other frontline employees at these state-funded agencies have seen their wages go up an average of more than \$5 per hour.

But starting wages remain barely above minimum wage in many agencies, turnover is often 50% or more and vacancies are staggeringly high. And even when the state provides funding for DSP wage increases, it has not always required community agencies to pass the wage increases through to workers.

Last year, AFSCME

advocated for a \$3.50 an hour increase for frontline personnel to meet the Guidehouse study recommendations commissioned by the state in 2018. In the end, the budget included a \$1 hourly increase—not as high as it should be, but AFSCME secured legislative language ensuring the amount goes toward base wages.

“These jobs are incredibly difficult and our members care so much about the individuals they care for,” said Maggie Lyons, Council 31’s strategic campaign coordinator. “We’ve fought for and won increases in the past, but it’s not enough. DSPs deserve more.”

Local 1038 members build solidarity while bonding with students

For AFSCME members at the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education (ICRE), the holiday season is about spreading joy for their students while building solidarity within their union.

ICRE is a DHS residential educational program for students with disabilities, orthopedic impairments and health impairments in Chicago. Members of AFSCME Local 1038 at ICRE are educators, case managers and residential care workers, among others.

Every year, the members of Local 1038 put on a long list of holiday activities for the students, starting two weeks before the holiday break with the help of some of the school’s nonprofit partners. The students get gifts, sing carols, watch Christmas movies—but most importantly, they get to experience the joy of the holiday season.

“It’s rewarding to see the students be so happy,” said

Jennifer Buckler, an activities therapist at ICRE who plays a central role in organizing the activities. “Maybe some of them haven’t had as much of an opportunity to be a part of big celebrations like this.”

Right before the holiday break, the staff put on two additional parties for the students and their families. One of their nonprofit partners—the Carol Gervasio Foundation, a holiday mainstay at ICRE for more than 50 years—lets the students submit a wish list of gifts totaling up to \$100. The students invite their families, and together they sing Christmas carols and share a meal before they get to open presents delivered by Santa Claus himself.

The ICRE staff also gets in on the fun. The center’s culinary teacher helps the students cook a holiday meal—this year was mostaccioli, turkey and breadsticks—that the staff, students and families alike all share.

“It’s really rewarding any time we can bring the students, their families and the staff together, to see everyone just enjoy the holiday spirit and relax,” Buckler said. “It’s one of the few times a year that we get to actually come together as a community.”

Sarah Maass, an administrative assistant I and the vice president of Local 1038, said that bringing the students together to experience the joy of the holidays is one of the best parts of their job. But having an opportunity to bring together union members from all across the center who wouldn’t normally interact with each other is a joy in itself.

Building that cohesiveness also helps them better serve their students.



Members of Local 1038 with an ICRE student during the holiday festivities.

“If you hit it off with someone, you could say, ‘Hey, let’s collaborate on something,’” Maass said. “If some folks in residential and others in education want to pair up to do something together, it really goes a long way towards helping the students.”

Classes can be stressful and a lot of ICRE’s students have major life decisions coming up once they graduate from the

program: Do they want to pursue post-secondary education? What kind of career would make them happy? But at the holiday parties, those stressful questions can be put on hold.

“We have a lot of difficult conversations with students about what they want to do in the future,” Maass said. “For them to have a chance to be present, to live in the moment—it’s priceless.”

Grievances correct wrongfully denied leave, fix leaky roof

One juvenile justice worker's fight for his family. AFSCME Local 494 pushes to fix a leaky roof. The union grievance process helped these AFSCME members take action to defend their rights and make their workplaces better for everyone.

Fighting for family

Antonio Panzica is a corrections maintenance craftsman at Illinois Youth Center-Chicago and a member of AFSCME Local 3436.

In 2021, his family provided foster care to 8-year-old Aniyilah. The Panzicas had been considering growing their family through adoption for a while, and after the foster period, they decided to make it official: They were going to adopt her.

Panzica was looking forward to taking the 10-week parental leave that is established in the AFSCME state of Illinois master contract. Even in the case of adoption, new parents are entitled to those 10 weeks of leave.

But when he submitted the paperwork to take his leave, it was denied. He tried again; it was denied then, too.

"I was really upset over the situation," he said. "No one was giving me the right answers. I had all the paperwork I needed, including an order from the judge showing that the adoption was initiated. But they still denied it."

Panzica tried to work with the state to rectify the issues

they were having with his application. But they insisted on having documents other than those outlined in the union contract—documents that he had already provided several times.

"It was important for us to officially welcome her to our family."

"The language in the contract says that the leave should be approved when the adoption is initiated by a judge," he said. "That's not what I was being told."

So his union representatives filed a grievance on his behalf. And the grievance was won at arbitration.

When he finally was able to take his parental leave, he said those 10 weeks were about bonding with Aniyilah, making her feel more comfortable and spending time together as a family with Panzica's two biological children.

"It was important for us to welcome her to our family. We made sure to drop her off and pick her up from school every



Panzica and his family pose outside the courthouse when their adoption of Aniyilah was made official.

day," he said. "We went away for the weekend to celebrate the adoption. We ended up getting a hotel room, went out to dinner and it was beautiful."

Panzica and his family have recently been considering adopting another child. He said he hopes that the success of the grievance will make the next parental leave process smoother than the last.

Stopping the rains

When the roof of the training room at Pontiac Correctional Center began to leak several years ago, employees working in that area came up with a creative workaround.

They strung up a series of garbage bags that together created a channel which routed the dripping water into buckets below.

But the falling water eventually caused the floor tiles to come loose and detach from the floor, creating a tripping hazard.

Pontiac serves as a regional training site for the Department of Corrections, and the room with the leak is where the majority of those trainings happen.


"It made training more complicated," said Will Lee, president of Local 494 and a correctional lieutenant at Pontiac. "We had people coming in from all over the place to train here and where do we put them? In a room with garbage bags strung up from the ceiling. It just didn't look good."

Recently AFSCME and the state had scheduled a labor-management meeting to discuss online job applications and Shakman procedures. AFSCME insisted that the meeting take place in the training room.

"Having deputy directors sitting in that room watching the rain come down, it didn't look good for them," Lee said.

But the local didn't want to rely on management's common sense to address the problem, so earlier this year Local 494 filed a class-action grievance in the hopes of getting the state to finally repair the roof.

The grievance was recently sustained by an arbitrator, who wrote that "a safe environment is necessary for the holding of such meetings, which this was not."

Now repairs have finally begun to fix the leaking roof. 

STATE OF ILLINOIS CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS MOVE FORWARD

Negotiations for a new state of Illinois Master Agreement began in earnest at a three-day bargaining session in Champaign in early January. The parties have exchanged proposals that focus on workplace rights and working conditions—economic proposals will not be developed until later in the bargaining process.

AFSCME negotiators are arguing that addressing the understaffing crisis in state agencies requires making state government a better place to work. While the Union proposals are aimed at reducing the excessive amount of overtime that many employees currently are working, management's proposals would make it easier for the employer to mandate overtime—and would have the effect of reducing overtime pay.

The Union Bargaining Committee will resist any changes that would strip employees of their rights.



AFSCME members save man suffering from overdose

Well-trained AFSCME members working for the city of Chicago helped save a man who was experiencing an opioid overdose at a city-sponsored community resource fair.

The Chicago Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) frequently hosts resource fairs where members of the community can connect with job resources, get access to social services and receive free toiletries and hygiene products.

Jamila Ford, a public health administrator II at the Chicago Department of Public Health and a member of AFSCME Local 505, was at one such resource fair on Dec. 8, handing out fentanyl testing strips and distributing literature about substance abuse and treatment.

One of Ford's responsibilities is to train community members, ward employees and other city staff on harm reduction and how to treat overdoses, including training on how to properly administer Narcan—a life-saving opioid inhibitor that is used to reverse the effects of an overdose.

In early 2022, Ford hosted such a training for DFSS workers like Sam Theodore,

a human services specialist II at DFSS and member of Local 1669.

At the resource fair on Dec. 8, Theodore noticed an attendee who appeared to be under the influence of drugs. At first, other people at the fair had called security to ask that he be removed. But Theodore and other members of DFSS saw that something was wrong.

The man was more than intoxicated. He could hardly stand up. Theodore remembered the training that Ford had given on how to spot the signs of an opioid overdose, and it became clear to him that immediate intervention was needed.

"We called 911 and carried him all the way to the seating area," Theodore said. "He couldn't stand. The man he came with—we think it was his brother—was also becoming more and more concerned."

Once the DFSS employees carried the man to a safe area, they were able to administer



Public Health Administrator Jamila Ford delivers a presentation on fentanyl testing to employees of the Chicago Department of Family Support Services in early 2022.

a dose of Narcan—from the very same supply that Ford had provided at the training earlier that year.

The first dose of Narcan wasn't effective. Theodore and his co-workers were worried.

That's when Ford was returning from her lunch break. She saw the commotion and rushed over to assist.

"They were panicking because they didn't know that they could give more than one dose," Ford said. "But right when I walked in, I just said, 'Hit him again!'"

They administered another

dose of Narcan, and this time it was effective. The second shot made him snap out of it, and the man was eventually able to walk to the ambulance under his own power, appearing to have been saved from what could have potentially been a fatal overdose.

"It's so surreal," Ford said. "They remembered their training. It just feels so great knowing that we were able to help this man."

There's no telling what could have happened if Ford hadn't done that training, or if the workers at DFSS hadn't had

access to the Narcan that was provided that day.

"We wouldn't have had that Narcan if it weren't for Jamila," Theodore said. "It's because of her that we had those sprays available and nearby, and it's because of her that we knew how to use it."

"This just goes to show that Narcan does save lives," Ford said. "Everyone that deals with the public in this way needs to have access to Narcan, and they need to know how to properly use it. It's literally the difference between life and death." 🦅



GREEN DAY IN CHICAGO

For more than 6 months, AFSCME members in the city of Chicago have been fighting for a fair contract that rewards their hard work and dedication to the city's residents, but progress at the bargaining table has been too slow. On Dec. 8, union members across the city showed their support for their bargaining committee by wearing green to work.

HRDAC pushes to gut university worker protections

The State University Civil Service System (SUCSS) was created to ensure the fair and equal recruitment, retention and development of university staff and provides critical protections to workers in the university system.

But it's come under threat by a push from the University Civil Service Human Resource Directors Advisory Committee (HRDAC) to gut the system's protections.

Last year, several universities began an effort in the state legislature to make changes to the law which governs SUCSS. Council 31's lobbyists were able to quash the bill before it advanced. But now it appears the universities will try again in the new legislative session.

One of the key responsibilities of SUCSS is to ensure equal access and opportunity for all job applicants, making sure that

the most qualified applicants are ultimately selected for the job. The system was installed as a safeguard against the corruption and patronage that used to run rampant.

One of the biggest changes the HRDAC is pushing for is completely scrapping the testing system which determines the rank of all applicants seeking a civil service position. The tests consist of training and experience evaluations that make sure the applicant is qualified for the job.

Ben Riegler, a senior library specialist and president of Local 698, which represents

more than 400 staff at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, says he's grown concerned about the motives behind the HRDAC's push for fewer safeguards.

"It will give them the ability to be much more arbitrary in who they hire, instead of the people who have the best scores," Riegler said. "It's obvious that this would be a negative to the university, but also for the employees. If this goes


the university system's ability to hire temporary employees. Under the current system, a university can use temporary employees for up to 900 hours of labor, after which that employee will no longer be allowed to work on a temporary basis.

If those limits were lifted, it would allow universities to use temporary employees as often and for as long as they would like instead of hiring full-time employees.

for the state nor for the taxpayers. We just want to do things the way we want and the fewer restrictions on us, the better."

They also want to get rid of protections for workers who are in grant-funded positions, which would allow them to be laid off or fired for any reason at any time with no warning.

Council 31's lobbying team has remained vigilant for any movement in the state legislature on any possible changes to SUCSS.

"SUCSS is crucial to upholding the integrity of the state university system, and even more important to the workers who rely on the system to protect them and ensure equal and fair treatment," said Dominic Watson, Council 31's legislative affairs specialist. "When Council 31 succeeded in defeating changes the first time, we knew the proponents were bound to try again. When that day comes, we'll be ready." 

"If this goes through, we would not have the most talented, most qualified employees working with us."

through, we would not have the most talented, most qualified employees working with us."

Another area of concern for AFSCME members is the HRDAC's stated desire to scrap requirements in SUCSS that limit

"They want the flexibility to hire who they want, when they want, without any restrictions or oversight," Riegler said. "They're saying, 'We want to do things how it works best for us as an employer, not what's best

School of the Art Institute faculty officially join AFSCME

More than 600 non-tenure track faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) voted overwhelmingly to form their union with AFSCME in a National Labor Relations Board mail-ballot election held in November and December.

The SAIC adjunct professors and lecturers voted 377 Yes to 33 No (92%) to join Art Institute of Chicago Workers United (AICWU), the AFSCME-affiliated local union formed last year by staff of the school and museum.

"When we saw 92% yes votes, we were all blown away," said Elizabeth Cote, a lecturer at the school and a member of the workers' organizing committee. "We knew that it was strongly supported but seeing that number still knocked us on the floor."

The AICWU faculty activists spent months educating their colleagues on why forming a union was right for their workplace. That required breaking down barriers that have existed at the school for years.

"The thing about SAIC is it can feel extremely isolated," said Luna Jaskowiak, a lecturer who teaches logic and math. "It feels really difficult to meet people if you don't have a connection between you and them. Via all of this union organizing, I've been

actually able to meet my colleagues."

Breaking down those barriers allowed the non-tenure-track faculty to build bonds and forge new relationships that ultimately makes them stronger as a unit.

"It lets you see that the issues and struggles you have with your working conditions are shared by many other people and are not your individual problems," Jaskowiak said. "It brings people together and creates solidarity. You see yourself reflected in someone else's situation and you can identify with it. You don't have to suffer in silence."


In the coming weeks, the new AFSCME members will begin the process of preparing to bargain their first union contract, including electing a bargaining committee to represent them in negotiations, holding listening sessions with their colleagues, and distributing a bargaining survey so everyone



Non-tenure track faculty at the School of the Art Institute won their union election with 92% of the vote.

can share the issues that matter to them.

"I think we're excited about bargaining because we're excited about making changes and figuring out what we really want," Cote said. "There's been so

many great ideas that have been brought up by our colleagues on what we should focus on in bargaining. I'm excited for all of the possibilities because everything feels so open and available right now." 

STATE STAFFING CRISIS TA

Illinois state government is critically understaffed—with some 7,000 vacant positions at the start of the fiscal year. While state agencies have finally recognized the scale of the crisis and begun to revamp their recruitment and hiring procedures, progress has been slow and urgency lacking. Meanwhile, the state's default position has been to require employees to work excessive amounts of overtime. Once understood to be an emergency measure, forced overtime has become standard operating procedure in 24/7 facilities like correctional facilities, veterans' homes, mental health and developmental centers, and youth centers.

Employees are being driven to exhaustion, jeopardizing their health and safety.

Council 31 recently conducted an electronic survey of workers on the front lines in the state's 24/7 facilities. Their firsthand accounts (which are included to the right of this column) paint a stark picture of the conditions they face every day: forced overtime multiple times a week; stress-related illness and substance use; strained personal relationships; missed family birthdays and holidays.

"A job working for the state of Illinois should be a source of pride, not anguish," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "The situation that state government employees are being put in, day in and day out, is clearly harming their emotional and physical well-being."

State workers are more than just a line item in a budget. They are more than the sum of their overtime hours. They are people with lives they wish to enjoy and children they want to watch grow up. They do jobs whose missions they deeply care about, but are hampered by the conditions they are forced to endure through no fault of their own.

These reports from the frontlines represent only a fraction of the hundreds of responses the Council 31 survey received. Together, they paint a portrait of the dire consequences of excessive overtime and erratic scheduling.

“

My family has fallen apart. I can barely sleep anymore and have frequent night terrors now. I didn't used to be much of a drinker but now I need to drink to get to sleep.

– Security Therapy Aide

“

While working I was assaulted by a male patient and there was only one other available staff to assist. This resulted in me having a permanent injury to my dominant hand and my whole life has changed.

– Mental Health Technician II

“

One officer is assigned to work 2-3 housing units as a wing officer. That is one officer per 250 individuals in custody and they are expected to do feeds and medical lines.

– Correctional Officer

“

On my weekend off I have worked 32 hours.

– Certified Nursing Assistant

“

Only getting 8 hours off in a 24-hour period to handle all household affairs is inadequate. We barely have enough time for the commute and sleep. I'm afraid it is negatively impacting my marriage and relationship with my children.

– Correctional Officer

“

I've missed out on a lot in the past year due to working doubles every day.

– Mental Health Technician II

“

I have been to the emergency room twice due to injuries sustained while intervening in youth fight, I have experienced numerous days that my stress level is at an all-time high.

– Juvenile Justice Supervisor

“

Recently one of my colleagues was in a terrible car accident that caused him to be on life support and is currently fighting for his life. He pulled 16-hour shifts almost every day.

– Mental Health Trainee

WORK TAKES TOLL ON EMPLOYEES

“

I have missed multiple holidays, birthdays, and family events because of work. I'm not able to put my children in extracurricular activities due to my work schedule and not being able to get time off. My mental health has declined to where I'm severely depressed. I have also gained weight due to the irregular work schedule.

– Correctional Sergeant

“

I am personally stressed out because it is my job to call and mandate people to adequately staff my shift. Therefore, I know when I'm calling to mandate someone, I mandated them the day before also. I know they have families and responsibilities other than this job. Management offers very little support and no solutions. Ironically, our mental health doesn't seem to matter. It's very frustrating.

– Security Therapy Aide III

“

I'm too tired to do anything but work.

– Cook II

“

Since there has been a lot of mandated overtime, I am not eating a proper diet. I barely get enough sleep to function the way we need to function in a prison setting.

– Corrections Treatment Officer

“

I'm on the verge of divorce due to excessive mandates over the last few years.

– Mental Health Technician II

“

Every day only one of three medical doctors is left so I am trying to do the work of three doctors. I cannot do this. I am exhausted mentally and physically.

– Physician

“

Our patients don't get the therapy, attention, programs, community outings and activities that they need or want because there isn't enough staff.

– Mental Health Technician

“

I'm struggling with anxiety and thoughts of quitting due to the fear I have from being understaffed and being placed in possibly serious harm or a deadly situation.

– Correctional Officer

“

There has been a major strain on my health mentally and physically. I now take medication just to be able to get through the day.

– Mental Health Technician

“

I personally work between 50 to 80 hours overtime every two weeks.

– Correctional Officer

Addressing the staffing crisis

Council 31 has been fighting for adequate staffing levels at all agencies—by engaging state legislators, holding informational pickets at job sites, and more recently, raising the issue front and center in bargaining with the state of Illinois.

Council 31 has proposed a number of innovative measures to department leaders that could be taken immediately to foster better recruitment, hiring and retention, including:

- Institute a program to pay employees double time for hours worked over 60 hours in one week.
- Revamp state hiring procedures and establish specific time-frames for processing job applications and promotional bids.
- Establish a retention bonus for new employees who remain on the job for at least one year.
- Form local or regional labor-management work groups to develop and implement recruitment strategies most relevant to the immediate community.

Union calls for critical maintenance work at Stateville CC

The Illinois Department of Corrections has invested heavily in revamping Stateville Correctional Center to focus more on offender re-entry, but the state's new vision for Stateville hasn't been followed by the necessary facility repairs to match.

In recent years, IDOC has been in the process of transitioning Stateville in a new direction, one that emphasizes job training and college classes for individuals in custody.

Local union leaders were told that critically needed maintenance at the facility would be completed prior to the start of the new programming. But with the college courses set to begin soon, the repair work still hasn't been done.

Ralph Portwood, a corrections clerk II and the president of Local 1866 at the prison, said that lingering facility maintenance and construction have been ignored for years and make working at Stateville difficult, even dangerous.

"The department says they want to improve the facility and make it nicer to accommodate these new programs, but the work never gets done. Whenever something breaks, it gets a Band-Aid instead of a real fix," he said. "What we fear is that the work that needs to

take place to make this facility operable is not going to happen."

Failing roof, few solutions

Stateville's roof has been in terrible condition for years. Whenever it rains, workers must scramble to make sure electronic equipment doesn't short-circuit. When heavy rains come, Portwood said it can feel like it's actually raining inside the building, with water pouring down from three floors above.

The failing roof and its leaks breed other issues. Mold and mildew have been steadily growing inside the facility for years.

"The department says they addressed the mold and mildew," Portwood said. "But you can smell it in some of the rooms. We've been smelling it for years. Certain areas we don't use because there's so much mold."

The mold and mildew have



Stateville has experienced lingering maintenance issues that make working there difficult and dangerous.

made some administrative offices completely uninhabitable. The water damage has gotten so bad that some areas of the facility need to be completely gutted and rehabbed, and Portwood says there are entire areas of office space that have been abandoned due to the damage.

Taking action

Local 1866 has been doing everything possible to get their concerns addressed, from bringing in state Department of Labor safety and health inspectors to


"We've heard all the promises before. Now it's time for some real follow-through."

filing class-action grievances. But still the issues persist.

"The stress level is through the roof," Portwood said. "It's stressful coming to work every

day knowing that if it's raining outside, you're going to have to tend to leaks and make sure your equipment doesn't get ruined if it's raining in your office."

After the union filed the class-action grievance, the department installed a temporary roof, but most of the leakage issues weren't solved. IDOC has said it intends to install a new permanent roof this summer.

"We've heard all the promises before," Portwood said, "Now it's time for some real follow-through." 

Roof leak in IDOT office makes work arduous

Illinois Department of Transportation employees who work at its Ash Street facility in Springfield say that a roof leak that has gone unfixed for years has created a "demoralizing" workspace for many AFSCME members in the office of Highway Project Improvement, which tests materials used in road maintenance and construction.

About four years ago, the roof of one of the Highway Project Improvement office buildings developed a leak. Water started to run down from the ceiling, through the walls, and wherever else it could find a way in. Even now, there are

buckets catching water wherever it leaks. Plaster on the walls has been crumbling due to the water in the walls.

In one supervisor's office, a ceiling tile has been replaced with a catch basin with a hose that runs down to a drain to

stop water from leaking onto equipment. That supervisor ran the metals testing laboratory, which was right outside his door, but the leaks became so unsafe that he was moved to another office nowhere near the lab.


AFSCME Local 2813 President Greg Keen, an IDOT storekeeper II, said that repairing the roof hasn't been a priority for Central Management Services. There have been plans to move the office to a newer building with more modern lab equipment for several years now. Keen says that the move has given CMS a reason not to repair the roof. But for the people who have to work every day



Plaster peels away from the wall at IDOT's Ash Street facility in Springfield.

in the office, that reason isn't good enough.

"It's demoralizing for the people who work here," Keen said. "The employer doesn't care about us enough to fix the

plaster. It never gets picked up when it falls, so it just lays there. How can you have a good attitude coming to work when the people in charge don't care about where you work?" 



A garage at Rock Cut State Park near Rockford was condemned in 2014 due to mold, asbestos and structural issues, but it still had to be used by AFSCME members at the park regularly.

Condemned park facility in use until AFSCME member acts

A sign posted on the door to the upper storage garage at Rock Cut State Park near Rockford reads “Do Not Enter”—and for good reason. The garage roof is collapsing in on itself. Debris is strewn across the floor. Asbestos is everywhere and mold is consuming what remains of the ceiling.

Yet workers in the Illinois Department of Natural Resources use the building regularly, even though it was condemned nearly eight years ago by health and safety inspectors. While employees weren’t required by management to enter the upper garage, there was simply no other place to store their equipment.

That was the case until DNR Site Technician II Justin Gaudreau, a member of AFSCME Local 448, took action. His union representative filed a grievance on his behalf in October 2022.

“I understand budgets are

tight, but it seems completely ridiculous that this big, state-run public park in the middle of a city center is in such bad shape,” Gaudreau said.

The grievance the union filed requests that the condemned building be torn down and replaced with a safe storage facility.

The DNR workers use the upper garage to store lawnmowers, hand tools and large saws. After the grievance was filed, management responded by relocating the lawnmowers to the lower garage—which is already over capacity.

But moving most of the equipment didn’t solve the

problem of what to do with their workbenches and table saws that are still stored in the upper garage.

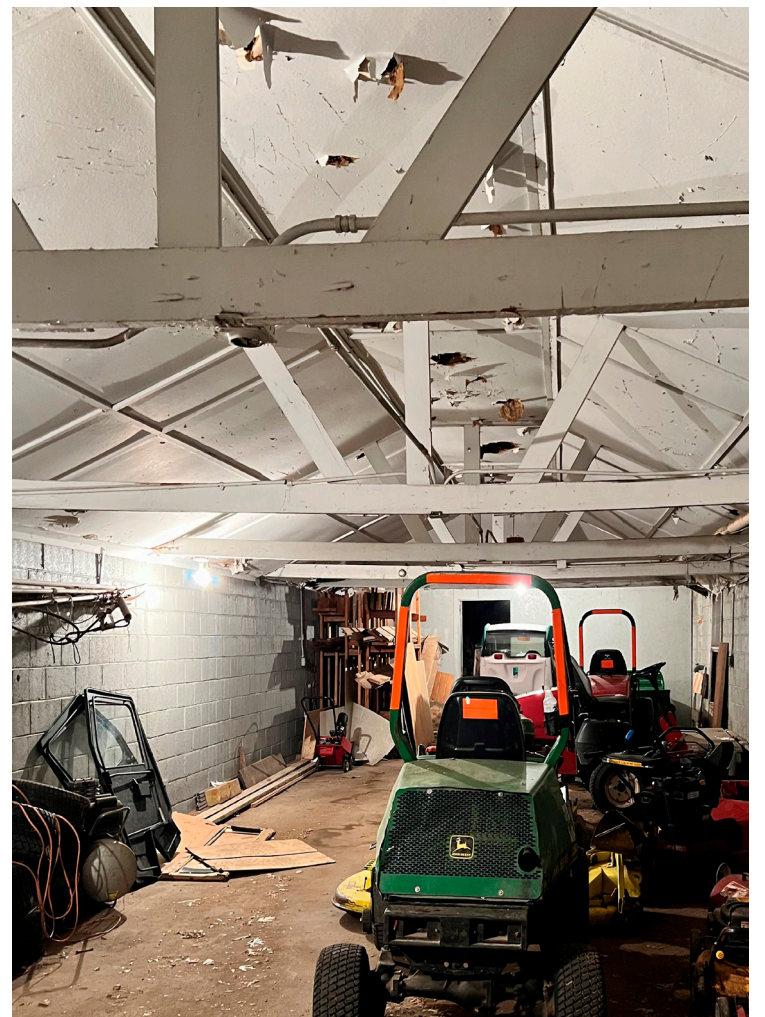
The lower garage is in safer structural condition than the upper garage, but there are still problems; there are animals living in the ceiling and every garage door needs to be replaced.

Plus, the new influx of materials and equipment from the upper garage has created its own safety hazards. Just a few months ago, one of Gaudreau’s colleagues tripped over all the clutter and sliced his hand on a mower blade. He was out of work for several weeks.

The upper garage is one of the first things that people coming to enjoy the park see when they enter. It sits right next to the park’s main office.

Gaudreau says its condition sends a bad message to the public.

“It conveys a lack of care and appropriate maintenance,” he said. 



The upper garage’s roof has been collapsing for years.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME members on the Wexford bargaining committee meet before negotiations begin.

Wexford workers hold strong for fair wages

A CONTRACT SETTLEMENT reached last month between AFSCME Council 31 and Wexford Health Sources was overwhelmingly ratified by the RN's and other health professionals who work for Wexford in Illinois state prisons.

As the union bargaining committee expected, Wexford's first offer was way lower than what employees deserved. But the committee stuck to their guns and offered a counter that they thought was fair. After more back and forth, Wexford agreed.

They had struck a deal after only one bargaining session, something Talitha Brooks, a mental health staff assistant at Joliet Treatment Center and a member of AFSCME Local 1753 said was "unheard of."

"We all work hard, particularly during these last couple years with COVID," Brooks said. "We deal with a lot every day when we come to work, but we all still come in and work the frontlines, and the company should know that. They need to know that we are worth the money they pay us. And I think with this contract, they acknowledged that."

Effective Jan. 1, 2023, all eligible Wexford workers received a 2% increase, with an additional 2.5% increase to follow on July 1. The agreement covers around 1,200 AFSCME members who work for Wexford.

Not only did they get a cost-of-living adjustment, they raised the introductory, minimum and maximum wages to meet new market standards for health care workers.

AFSCME members employed by Wexford work

in dangerous settings with inmates who can be erratic and sometimes violent.

"Wexford wants to compare us to a typical hospital, but they don't realize the abuse we deal with, they don't understand the potential for assaults we deal with every day," Brooks said. "We all get hired with the degrees we need and the qualifications

that Wexford expects, and we expect the wages to match those qualifications."

Marci Smith is a dental hygienist at Graham Correctional Center and a member of AFSCME Local 2856 who served on the Wexford bargaining committee. When she first started working for Wexford in 1997, their workplace hadn't been unionized yet. For her,

this contract is only the latest example of their union having their backs.

"Before the union, we had terrible benefits," Smith said. "When we win contracts like this, people start to see that Wexford didn't give us anything that we have today. They start to see that the union made all of this possible."

Both Smith and Brooks remember having to scratch and claw for every wage gain that they ever won, and they remember how challenging it has been to get Wexford to respect their work. But the struggles they've endured as a group have brought them closer together.

"We've come a long way with Wexford, but we've also come a long way in terms of our solidarity," Brooks said. "We're learning how powerful we can be when we stick together."

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representatives Patricia

Rensing and Ty Petersen, and included 24 AFSCME members employed by Wexford at correctional facilities across the state.

Local 1555 takes action for fair contract

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 1555 at Horizon House of Illinois Valley were almost nine months into negotiating a new contract. Employees of the non-profit that serves adults with disabilities weren't making much progress with management at the bargaining table.

They knew they had to take action.

They had yard signs printed which said "Essential Employees Deserve Fair Pay" and placed them in strategic locations around their community.

They had the support of



WILL COUNTY MEMBERS RATIFY FIRST OF SIX CONTRACTS

AFSCME members in Will County ratified a new agreement that covers roughly 500 members, including county employees who work in animal control, land use and transportation, as well as 911 operators, deputy coroners and most Sunny Hill Nursing Home employees.

Remaining contracts for members who work in the Office of the Chief Judge, Circuit Court Clerk, Sunny Hill RNs, the health department and the sheriff's department are still being negotiated.

one critical group: the families of the people they care for. Family members of residents circulated petitions and sent a letter to the CEO of the agency urging him to give the workers raises so the individuals in care won't lose the people with whom they've built trusting relationships.

One family member wrote that losing "these trusted, valuable employees would not only hurt Horizon House by having to hire and train new employees, but hurt the bond that the residents have built with them."

"When we come to work, we don't do it for the guys in the office," said Heather Pizano-Olson, the president of Local 1555 and a direct support professional (DSP). "We do this for the families and the people we serve. We need the support of the families of the people who rely on us. That is one of the reasons we were able to push this through."

Sarah Steil, also a DSP at Horizon House, took the lead on organizing Local 1555's public-facing actions.

"I think they realized that we were united and the more people we had together showed them we were standing together," Steil said. "And we deserve something better than we're being offered."

When Steil says they deserved something more, she means it: when bargaining over wages began, management's initial proposal was offensively low. All they offered was an hourly increase of 25 cents.

Ultimately, the bargaining team won an hourly wage increase of \$1.75, with 50 cents retroactive to July. They also secured the ability to run a vacation time buyback program, which Pizano-Olson said was important to a lot of members who sometimes feel guilty taking extended vacations while the agency is short-staffed. The one-year buyback program will prevent some longtime employees from letting their vacation days go unused.

"Everybody is very happy with the agreement that we've reached," Steil said. "The atmosphere is way better. I've worked there for 15 years, and this is the best contract I can remember."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Lori Laidlaw, and included Pizano-Olson, Vice President Tanya Cleary and



AFSCME Local 1555 took action to secure a contract their members are happy with.

Treasurer Nikki Arteaga.

Rock Island Health Dept. workers make gains

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 2025-B in the Rock Island County Health Department have always known they were health care workers.

At the height of the pandemic, when they stood in the frigid cold to administer vaccine shots at an outdoor drive-through clinic in Moline, they were health care workers.

"They realized that we were united."

When they go to work, they follow all the same rules and regulations that health care workers abide by.

Throughout the pandemic, management has lauded their work as health care workers. But when it came time to bargain for a new contract, management rolled their eyes at the thought of paying them like health care workers.

"We have been told for

the last two years that we were health care," said Kelly Carroll, a program specialist at the health department and a member of Local 2025-B's bargaining committee. "But when we sat down at the table and said, 'We are health care,' the people across the table rolled their eyes and said, 'Not really.' We were only considered health care when it was convenient for them to say so."

Local 2025-B was fighting for wages that would bring them up to par with other health departments in their region, while rewarding the employees who have been with the department for decades.

"We're the ones with all the knowledge in this department," Carroll said. "A lot of our supervisors don't even know what we do here. And it's time that we get compensated for that."

Initially, the county's negotiators only agreed to bring up the starting wages for new employees as a way of helping with recruitment and retention. But as bargaining wore on, union members' persistence paid off. In the five-year agreement they ratified, employees who have been with the health department for at least 10 years will receive a \$1.50 hourly increase and a \$1,250 bonus.

They ultimately won 12% across-the-board increases for

all members in the bargaining unit.

In addition to the wage increases, they added June-teenth as a paid holiday and added adoptive parents to the six-month parental leave of absence that was previously only available for the birth of a newborn child.

"I think we all came away feeling validated and respected with what we got in this contract," Carroll said.

The Local 2025-B bargaining committee included Council 31 Staff Representative Josh Schipp, Carroll, Karey Baxter, Steward Joleen Diehl and Janelle Nicewanner.

Local 2908 delivers for Woodford Co. members

BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 2908 began bargaining their latest contract in Woodford County, they knew that all the department heads in local government had gotten raises totaling nearly 23% over the next four years. The local aimed to deliver wage increases for union members that were in the ballpark of what managers got for themselves.

Ultimately, Local 2908 won wage increases that average around 26% over the four-year agreement.

Courthouse employees gain a new step on the wage scale at year 4. The longevity wage scale for highway department workers goes up half a percent per year.

The highway department also won double-time pay for any snow operations that fall on a Sunday (formerly time-and-a-half).

The new agreement also adds Election Day as a paid holiday, along with the right for workers with fewer than 10 years of service to accrue up to 50 sick days (80 days for those with more than 10 years of service).

"I feel like everyone has something to be happy about in this agreement, especially some of the older guys who have been around for a long time," said Steve Guy, a road maintenance worker in the highway department and the president of Local 2908. "It feels like as a group, everyone stuck together and stuck to their guns. We dug in and got what we deserve."

The Local 2908 bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler, and included Guy, Ben Burmood, Brittany Crisman, Deb Monge and Andrea Storm.

SHORT REPORTS



Field Museum Workers United announce their union is at majority support outside the museum on Nov. 15.

Field Museum workers file for election

EMPLOYEES OF THE FIELD Museum filed union representation petitions with the National Labor Relations Board in Chicago on Tuesday, Dec. 27.

The filing will trigger a union election in the coming weeks in which the employees can vote to formally certify their union, Field Museum Workers United, as part of AFSCME Council 31.

"We couldn't be prouder to have worked together to reach this milestone," the Field Museum Workers United organizing committee wrote in a letter to their colleagues. "It's the culmination of hundreds of conversations among colleagues in which we have shared our experiences and our ideas to make the Field Museum a more equitable, sustainable, and transparent workplace for employees at every level."

The Field Museum Workers United organizing committee made its public launch in October. By November the group announced that a strong majority of their colleagues had signed union cards and asked CEO Julian Siggers to voluntarily recognize their union. Siggers refused, instead continuing to engage in an anti-union campaign.

The workers' organizing committee is demanding that management's divisive tactics stop at once. "Forming our union is a decision for us, the employees, to make—not the employer," they wrote.

Field Museum Workers United will represent nearly 300 collections assistants and technicians; exhibitions preparators, registrars and designers; visitor service representatives; research scientists and assistants; groundskeeping and housekeeping staff; and many more.

Local 1110 wins Labor Militancy Award

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 1110 at Illinois State University recently won the Central Region AFL-CIO's 2442 Labor

Militancy Award for their "militant defense of collective bargaining and advocacy for worker organizing."

The 2442 award is named for the 24 members of the Normal fire department who were jailed for 42 days in the 1970s after they threatened to strike as their union fought the town for a fair contract. The town still required them to work, but with five days on call, five days in jail.

"To receive this award on behalf of the members of Local 1110 is a great honor," said Local 1110 President Chuck Carver. "It was a very special ceremony for our members."

Two of the firefighters

who were part of that labor battle so many years ago joined the members of Local 1110 on stage as they accepted the award.

Local 1215 member's legacy lives on

A NEW SPACE IN THE COOK County Jail pays homage to Becca Ruidl, a member of AFSCME Local 1215 and a librarian at the Chicago Public Library's Bucktown-Wicker Park branch, whose life was cut short by COVID-19 in March 2022.

In the visitation waiting area of the jail's Maximum Security Division, there now exists a colorful monument to her legacy: a nook full of children's toys, books, beanbag chairs and stuffed animals for children waiting to get to visit with a parent or other relative.

Ruidl dedicated her life and career to helping youth who come from disadvantaged backgrounds by improving access to education. It was Ruidl's "dream to provide a literary space for children of the incarcerated at the jail, where many children of color tend to spend time while visiting their loved ones," according to a story in the *Chicago Tribune*.

One of Ruidl's friends worked with Cook County


Sheriff Tom Dart to make the nook a reality. The nook's bright mural of sunflowers and animals reads: "Becca's Place."

LEOSA coverage for corrections workers on hold

HOUSE BILL 4667, LEGISLATION enacted in the General Assembly's spring session and signed into law by Gov. Pritzker on May 13, was scheduled to go into effect on January 1.

Spearheaded by AFSCME, the measure amends the state's Unified Code of Corrections to include active and retired correctional officers employed by the Illinois Department of Corrections or county governments as qualified law enforcement officers for purposes of coverage under the federal Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act (LEOSA).

Implementation of the law has stalled primarily because the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board has raised questions about whether correctional officers meet the federal law's standards for "law enforcement officers," particularly with regard to arrest powers and weapons training.

As *On the Move* went to print, it appeared that either an opinion from the Attorney General or a court ruling may be needed to compel forward movement. 



Members of AFSCME Local 1110 receiving the Labor Militancy Award at the Central Region AFL-CIO dinner in December.

RETIREE NOTES

Battle over Social Security looms

AS THE NEW CONGRESS CONvenes, a big battle is brewing over one of our nation's most important programs—Social Security. This year, Congress is required to vote on whether to raise the federal debt limit, an action that doesn't allow more spending but prevents the U.S. from defaulting on what it already owes.

Congressional Republicans are threatening to hold the debt limit hostage as leverage to push for cuts to Social Security benefits, such as raising the eligibility age and reclassifying the program's funding as discretionary (meaning Congress would have to vote on it every year).

The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare says seniors must prepare for a fight, since "Republicans [now] chair the powerful House Ways and Means and Budget committees, which have tremendous influence over Social Security and Medicare policy. The GOP can use these committees as pulpits to promote proposals that could undermine older Americans' financial and health security."

Social Security does have a funding problem. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Social Security trust fund is facing a shortfall that will result in full scheduled benefits being paid until 2034, at which point the fund will be able to pay out only 77% of scheduled benefits.

Common-sense solutions have already been identified. Senior advocates and Social Security experts support addressing the shortfall by scrapping or increasing the Social Security payroll cap. This policy was outlined in the Protecting and Preserving Social Security Act introduced by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) in July.

Currently, Social Security is funded by a 6.2% payroll tax paid by both workers and their employers. But those taxes only apply to people earning income up to \$147,000 as of 2022.

The Protecting and Preserving Social Security Act would phase out the income cap over a seven-year period and extend the depletion date to 2052, according to an analysis of the plan by the Social

Security Administration's Office of the Chief Actuary. In addition to keeping the program funded, it is projected that by the end of the 75-year period, it would reduce the federal deficit by about \$12.3 trillion.

This proposal would not only protect the program that prevents 22 million people from falling into poverty but would further assist those in need by updating the measure for the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

The annual Social Security COLA is calculated using the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers or CPI-W. This would be replaced by a better measure for seniors called the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly.

AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees will join the millions of seniors nationwide to stand up against legislation that will threaten Social Security and its beneficiaries, especially when common-sense solutions are being ignored.

Extra resources for seniors

WINTER CAN BE A DIFFICULT time for many seniors, whether they are dealing with increased health issues, navigating an increased need for care, or facing other difficulties. Programs available through the Illinois Department on Aging can provide an additional avenue of support during these stressful times.

- **The Community Care Program** provides in-home and community-based services to seniors who might otherwise need nursing home care. By enabling them to remain in their own homes, the program helps seniors to maintain their independence. Services include comprehensive care coordination, adult day services, in-home service, emergency home response services, and automated medication dispenser service.
- **Older Adult Services** supports older adults who wish to stay in their homes by restructuring the delivery of services to include home-based services as well as institutional care. This restructuring includes all aspects of service, including the provision of housing,



RETIRES GIVE BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Retirees from across the state make sure that the holidays are a time for giving, and AFSCME Retiree subchapters made sure to lend their communities a hand in any way they could.

"We are so grateful for the security that we have," said Larry Brown, President of AFSCME Illinois Retirees Chapter 31. "And therefore our subchapters take this time especially to give back to our local communities." 🦅

health, financial and supportive services for older people.

- **The Illinois Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program** is a resident-directed advocacy program that protects and improves the quality of life for residents in a variety of long-term care settings. Ombudsmen work to resolve problems of individual residents and to bring about changes at the local, state and national levels to improve care.

- **The Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP)** is a free statewide health insurance counseling service for Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers. For those without employer-sponsored insurance, SHIP can assist in applying for Medicare and finding sites in your area where you can get assistance.

Additional services include Alzheimer's & Dementia Resources, Automated Medication Dispenser

Program, Discounts on License Plates, Free Public Transit Program, Nutrition Program, the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program, Senior Community Service Employment Program, and many others. 🦅

For more information on the resources available to seniors, call (800) 252-8966, go online at laging.illinois.gov, or email AGING.SHIP@ILLINOIS.GOV



and I and thanked us for keeping the building so clean. He told us that it's as clean as the day the building opened up. Another time, the dean of the business school also came up to us and told us how grateful he is for all the work that we do and asked us what changes could be made to keep the building cleaner, and he listened to our suggestions.

Why is it important to take pride in your work?

These buildings that have Illinois in their name depend on us. They depend on the workers who make these places go. Whether it's mental health services, corrections or at a state university, we are the ones who allow these places to operate.

Are you active in your local union?

Around six years ago I became the president of Local 963. I had reached the top of the pay scale and I made the decision to get more involved in leadership. A union is supposed to be a brotherhood of workers coming together, supporting each other, and raising the concerns they need raised. That's what I tried to do as president.


How has your union improved your workplace?

The job has allowed me to pay off my house. If you need to go to the doctor, you can. I have a family and if one of them gets sick and I need to take care of them, I can do that because of the

“We want to be treated fairly... And our union helps us do that.”

union. The union gives us those protections. A lot of places don't have that.

When we negotiated our last contract, starting pay was around \$11 an hour. We were able to get that starting pay up to \$16. But now we have these huge corporations in town like 3M, you have the Facebook data center coming soon, and those companies drive up wages. In order to compete, we're going to need to bargain for more competitive wages.

We want to be treated fairly. We want our opinion to matter. And our union helps us do that. 

Manny Diaz

AFSCME Local 963

BUILDING SERVICE WORKER

Tell us about your job at Northern Illinois University.

My job is to maintain the third floor of Barsema Hall, which is the business building. It's the crown jewel of NIU. It's a big building, and I'm responsible for taking care of about 45,000 square feet and most of it needs to be taken care of before students and faculty start arriving for classes at 8 a.m. I'm cleaning 32 toilets, 18 sinks, and massive square footage in between. When you have the massive influx of people coming through the building every day, you have to maintain that quality.

It's a difficult job with lots of repetitive motions that really take a toll on our bodies. All the BSWs here have aches and pains, but we still show up every day and get the job done.

What's your favorite part of being a BSW?

One day, I was in the restroom changing out the hand towels. There was a kid in there who was frantic because it was presentation day, and he couldn't get his tie tied. He was freaking out because their appearance was part of their

overall grade, and if his suit didn't look professional, he would have lost points. After I tied it for him, he ran off to do his presentation. When I saw him the next day and asked him how it went, he told me that because I helped him out, he aced it.

It's just part of what we do. We all love being a part of the NIU atmosphere and the NIU community.

Do you find pride in your work?

I think most BSWs take pride in what we do. Some people have concepts of us as being uneducated. That can't be farther from the truth. Some of us have four-year degrees. Some of us have master's. Before I came here, I worked in graphic arts and I found myself in a position where I needed a job. That's how it is for a lot of us, but we all work so hard because we care so much about giving these kids a clean place to work and learn.

People really appreciate what we do and that goes a long way. A while back, Dennis Barsema [the businessman and donor for whom Barsema Hall is named] came up to a couple of coworkers