

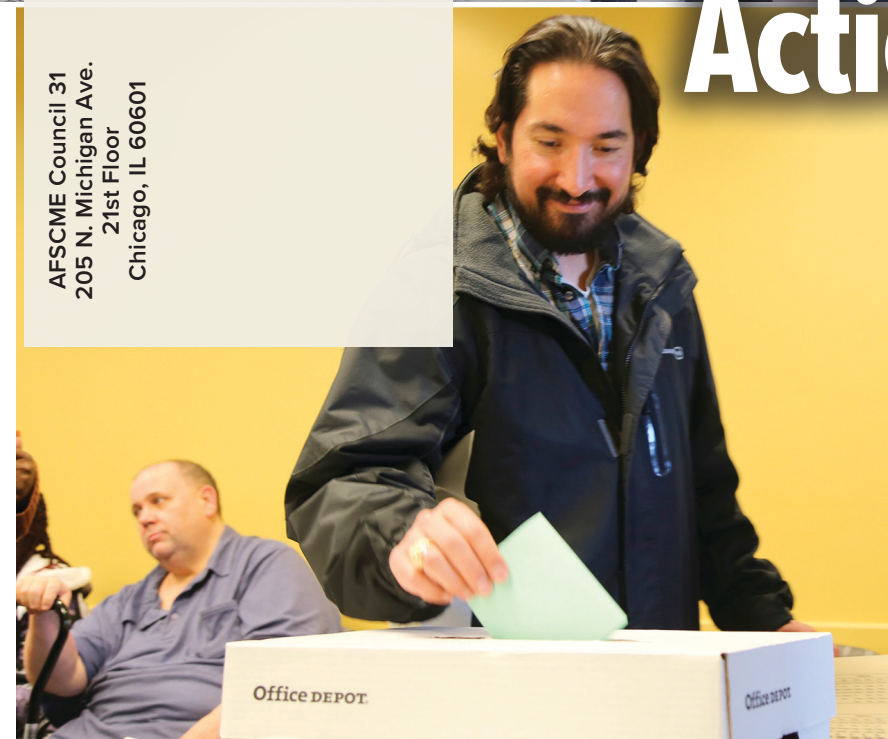
ON THE

MOVE



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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

It's time to fight for pension fairness

An uphill battle that must be waged



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING IN OUR RETIREMENT.

We've all seen the ads: happy-looking silver-haired folks boarding cruise ships, hiking on some tree-lined path, out fishing on the lake, or settling into supportive living. All images of comfort and contentment.

That's the promise of retirement in our time. And for millions of public employees at the state and local levels, that promise rests on the foundation of defined benefit pension plans. For a lifetime of work at jobs that are unduly demanding, that often take a heavy physical toll, and that frequently pay less than their private sector counterparts, these employees count on the security in retirement that a defined benefit pension plan provides.

In fact, it is very often that promise of retirement security that serves as a key recruitment incentive in filling essential jobs like teacher, child abuse investigator, firefighter, probation officer, environmental engineer and so many more.

Pension funds were considered so stable that in some instances, such as the Illinois Teachers' Retirement System, the benefit plan was constructed as the sole support in retirement, removing plan participants from Social Security coverage.

But over the years there has been a steady erosion of that stability. As public sector employers too often failed to make the requisite contributions to the pension funds, especially in times of revenue shortfalls, pension debt began to grow and soon emerged as a major drain on public finances.

And once public pensions became a threat to fiscal stability, a driver of potential tax increases, and a subject of periodic media scrutiny, they also became a target of the wealthy elite who are ever alert for even the slightest restraint on their unfettered accumulation of wealth.

And so it happened that in Illinois well over a decade ago, the drumbeat of "pension crisis" began to echo loudly in the halls of power—followed quickly by widespread calls for

"pension reform." Some critics even then were calling for the dissolution of pension plans entirely, forcing employees into individual savings plans. Mostly, though, "reform" was deemed to mean benefit cuts. And legislators of both parties were only too eager to find ways to reduce the relatively modest annuity that public employees had always believed they could count on in their retirement years.

In 2010, despite vigorous opposition from AFSCME and other unions, legislation was enacted to reduce the pension benefits of all future employees (those hired after January 1, 2011).

However, not content with those future savings, just a few years later legislators decided to cut the pensions of current employees as well. Labor unions fought back with the only remaining weapon we had—the Illinois constitution. It included a provision that prohibited the diminution of pension benefits. While that clause could not be considered to apply to "future" employees, there was a solid legal argument that it applied to all current employees. So our union coalition—We Are One Illinois—went to court. In fact, we went all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court. And we won!

As a result of that union victory, hundreds of thousands of public employees—in school districts, state government, state universities, cities and counties—retained the pension benefits promised to them. Many have already retired and many more—now referred to as Tier 1 participants—are still working today, knowing their retirement is secure.

But increasingly today's public sector workforce is made up of those known as Tier 2 participants whose benefits are lower—and whose "retirement


age", i.e. when they can retire with full benefits, is higher.

Yet even though that Tier 2 benefit plan barely qualifies as modest, the attacks on public pensions continue to this day.

Yes, we've been able to beat back all such attacks. But that's not enough. It's time to insist on pension fairness—to repair the damage to retirement security done when Tier 2 was enacted. That's why AFSCME and other public sector unions have introduced measures in the current legislative session that would increase Tier 2 benefits to the level of Tier 1. Passage of such measures will require an intensive multi-year grassroots lobbying campaign—and the time to start is now.

Pension protection is all the more urgent given what is happening of late in Washington. The backstop for underfunded pension plans and individual savings/investment accounts has always been Social Security. With the exceptions already noted, every working American participates and for generations every retired American has been able to count on that steady, if modest, income to at least know that there would be food on the table and utility bills paid.

Now Republicans in the U.S. Congress have launched a renewed effort to reduce the Social Security benefit—and/or to raise the retirement age. That too will be a multi-year battle—and will require a nationwide response from labor unions and retiree organizations to defend this fundamental building block of retirement security.

With all the challenges confronting us daily these days, sometimes it's hard to focus on the future. But here's the problem: our opponents have the wealth and the will to do so. They're working right now to make it a lot more difficult for today's employees to count on financial security in their retirement years. If we're not prepared to fight back, they could all too easily prevail. It's up to us to insist that we have a right to dignity and a decent standard of living in our retirement—and to stand together to defend that right. 

Chicago members take action to win fair contract

Minutes before 2:00 a.m. on Feb. 24, the city of Chicago AFSCME bargaining committee reached agreement on a new contract for more than 3,000 AFSCME members across six different locals in city government.

“It was the unity and determination of the bargaining committee, along with steadfast member support, that enabled us to get the job done,” said Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman, who led the negotiations.

Throughout the 10-month contract fight, AFSCME members took a series of actions that got the attention of the city’s leadership. In October, they staged a city-wide Day of Action during which union members picketed outside their workplaces to demand a fair contract.

At every step along the way, members backed their bargaining committee in any way they could. They hung their “We Make Chicago Work” signs at their desks and wore buttons on designated days. They did anything and everything to make their fight

settlement happened just hours before members were planning to join together for another city-wide informational picket.

“From the start, we knew it would be quite a challenge,” said Caroline Broeren, chief steward for AFSCME Local 1215, which represents employees in the Chicago Public Library system. “The thing that got us to where we needed to be was the involvement of all of our members in the contract campaign that Council 31 put forward to make sure the city knew that we were unified.”

The five-year contract that city workers ultimately ratified includes 18.25% in raises. It also includes a provision for up to an additional 6% in raises depending on the rate of inflation in certain years of the contract. And




Members of AFSCME Local 505 in the Chicago Department of Public Health show solidarity with their bargaining committee in February.

“We got a lot of things that we asked for and that we deserved.”

654. “We got a lot of things that we asked for and that we deserved.”

On March 2, more than 98% of AFSCME members voted to ratify the agreement.

For the contract to officially go into effect, the City Council will need to vote on it. As On the Move went to print, the Council had not yet scheduled that vote. 



An AFSCME member enthusiastically votes to ratify the contract at City Hall.

visible and get management to see they wouldn’t back down.

Just days before a final agreement was reached, AFSCME members took to social media to tell the mayor directly why they deserve a fair contract. The contract

members will see significant additional increases due to improvements in the step plans.

The committee also won Covid-19 pandemic bonuses which reward the sacrifices that employees made for

Chicago residents during the massive public health crisis that shut down much of the city. The bonuses total \$3,000 over the next two years.

The contract includes no increases to what employees pay for health insurance premiums, co-pays or deductibles.

“It has been so energizing to be part of this campaign and to see the amount of dedication and time and effort that people are willing to put in,” Broeren said. “It shows that Chicago AFSCME members can do anything they put their mind to.”

“Based on the feedback from the ratification meetings, even the veteran people who have been employed by the city for 20 years or more were saying this is the best contract they’ve ever seen,” said Chantelle Hill, an investigator at the Civilian Office of Police Accountability in Local



AFSCME members had the backs of their bargaining committee throughout the 10-month contract fight.

Local leader wins Public Works Employee of the Year

Pat Ingram is a forestry foreman in the city of Freeport Department of Public Works and the president and chief steward of AFSCME Local 3367.

At a ceremony before the Freeport City Council on Feb. 2, he was named Public Works Employee of the Year.

Ingram has a “get-it-done” attitude and is exceedingly humble. If he had his way, the city would have given the award to someone else—he tried to turn it down, but they wouldn’t let him.

Most of Ingram’s days are spent in a bucket truck high above Freeport’s streets, repairing overhead street lighting and traffic lights, trimming trees and hanging banners and decorations.

Ingram and the other AFSCME members in the Public Works department are always on call to deal with dangerous trees or to fix the lights at a critical intersection. He suspects he may have been given the award because he always shows up, no matter how late at night or how early in the morning.

Not only is Pat an exemplary worker for the city of Freeport, but those who know him describe him as a natural leader of their local union which represents workers in

the city of Freeport’s water department, public works and more. He’s worked for the city


of Freeport for nearly 20 years.

“Pat is dedicated and selfless with his personal time as our local president,” said Andy Leverton, an instrumentation and control technician with the city and a member of Local 3367’s Executive Board. “He always stands up for the rights of his union brothers and sisters and carefully navigates

difficult situations with patience while maintaining his strong moral values.”

“Pat is a natural leader who considers all aspects of an issue before he makes a decision,” said Council 31 Staff Representative Lori Laidlaw. “He gets input from many sources then moves forward with what needs to be done. He always fights

like hell for the union membership.”

Although Ingram initially tried to turn down the award, he did admit he appreciated the recognition. After all, he decided to display the commemorative plaque on a shelf—where it’s not alone, but sits alongside his numerous trophies won at demolition derbies. 



Pat Ingram (center) accepts the award at a meeting of the Freeport City Council on Feb. 2. Credit: City of Freeport.

Grievance garners backpay for DuPage County Sheriff’s Office members

A FSCME Local 3184 members at the DuPage County Sheriff’s Office began negotiating a first contract in the summer of 2018.

Management played hardball, but the union committee played harder. In September 2022, they finally reached a contract settlement.

And when they did, there was a very bright spot that they had to look forward to: a large backpay payment for money earned while going years without a fair contract—and regular increases in pay.

Employees had just fought tooth and nail for a

fair contract for nearly four years. They were eager to stop fighting and just do their job. But when they saw their backpay checks, they knew they were about to have another fight on their hands: Nearly everyone’s checks were half of what they were supposed to be.

“It was a very frustrating four years at the bargaining table. We were all so tired,” said Crystal Pace, a steward

and mental health worker in the Sheriff’s Office. “And then this business with the checks started.”

Pace asked management personnel to check the calculations they had done to see if they could identify where the mistake occurred. They refused.

“Their response was if we wanted to see their calculations, we would have to submit our own calculations with an explanation as to why we thought their numbers were wrong,” Pace said. “That didn’t sit well.”

Calculating backpay over so many years is straightforward for salaried employees, but for the nurses who are members of Local 3184, it’s a different story.

They get paid shift differentials, overtime pay that varies every week, and many other variables that complicate the calculations. Calculating how much backpay a nurse was owed could take hours for even a seasoned accountant.


But Pace isn’t an accountant—just a committed union leader trying to right a wrong that was done to her colleagues. She diligently calculated her colleagues’ backpay on their behalf.

When the county still refused to turn over their calculations, the union filed a class action grievance on behalf of the affected members.

That determination paid off. The employer ultimately

relented and did the new calculations. In total, the union won nearly \$134,000 in rightfully owed backpay for 19 members of Local 3184.

“It was so relieving to finally have this done. My hope is that the next time we come to them with an issue, they’ll hear us out,” Pace said. “They’ll see that our request was legitimate.”

“This unit has faced so many challenges,” said Council 31 Staff Representative Cameron Day. “But through the tireless leadership of Crystal and Orlando Venecia, we were able to make sure that every bargaining unit member got paid what they were rightfully owed.” 

State museums return to normal after 8 years of tumult

They stared down a governor intent on destroying them. Then they weathered pandemic closures and reduced service. But after years of turmoil, AFSCME members in the Illinois State Museum system are finally returning to normal.

Last month, after nearly three years of reduced pandemic operating hours, the Illinois State Museum system announced that it is returning to regular hours, seven days a week.

"It feels great to be back to normal," said David Schultz, a museum technician at the State Museum in Springfield and member of AFSCME Local 1019. "It's great to once again be able to more adequately provide the services we once did and be open seven days a week so that as many people as possible can come visit the museum."

Schultz began working for the museum in 2018, three years after Gov. Bruce Rauner tried to shut the 138-year-old system down. The Illinois State Museum, Dixon Mounds State Museum and the Lockport Gallery were all shuttered by Rauner for 10 months between 2015 and 2016, supposedly to "cut costs."

Despite the months-long closures, AFSCME members still reported to work and collected paychecks because AFSCME Council 31 filed a lawsuit to prevent layoffs of union members. All non-union staff were laid off by the museum.

Rauner finally agreed to a partial reopening of the museum system in 2016, but at the cost of permanent

closures of the locations in Rend Lake and Chicago. The new arrangements also required the museums to begin charging admission fees for the first time.

John Lustig, a member of AFSCME Local 2794, is the

"The union was right there with us the entire time."

gallery director of the Lockport Gallery, a small art showcase under the umbrella of the Illinois State Museum system. During the Rauner shutdown, Lustig emerged as a key activist in the fight to get the state to reopen the museums to the public, testifying before the state legislature twice and staging a protest exhibition that was called "The People's Show" which pulled together more than 800 pieces of community-sourced artwork in less than three days as a way to show the governor how valuable their state-funded gallery was.

"Rauner did not understand what our responsibility is," Lustig said. "We have 12 million objects in our collections and it's our duty to protect them. This institution



Members of AFSCME Local 1019 at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield. Credit: Danyl Dolder

is at its core committed to preserving the story of Illinois. Rauner was completely unaware of how important that service is to Illinois."

Lustig said that the tumult of the shutdown made him realize the importance of his union to protect a public service caught in the political crosshairs.

"The union was right

there with us the entire time," he said. "The union has been this amazing guardrail for us, helping to prevent layoffs. It was because of the union that I was put into a position to testify before the legislature, and it was the union that kept this issue at the forefront."

When Rauner was defeated in 2018, museum workers breathed a brief sigh of relief. But shortly after, a new threat emerged: Covid-19. The museum system was once again closed to the public.

"It was scary," Schultz said. "Working on the frontlines at a museum, with visitors coming in from all over the world, we were nervous."

In Lockport, the Rauner years had prepared them for a sudden shutdown. They had an action plan in place to take care of the collections and began engaging with their community in different, safer ways, like hosting discussions and interviews with artists on Facebook.

One bright spot was that when the museum system

reopened in mid-2020, they returned to the free model to reduce risks to workers handling money. In announcing the return to regular hours, the museum also announced it would make free admission permanent once again.

"There's a lot of love for not only this institution but for what our staff do here—whether it's people in visitor services, curators, education team—all of these folks are really passionate about what they do," Schultz said. "We're all passionate about educating the public and about being here day in and day out to teach people about the natural and cultural history of our state."

The Springfield museum returned to regular hours just in time to open a new exhibit called "Growing Up X," about the childhood experiences of Generation X. It's the kind of interactive exhibit that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to put on while in the throes of a viral pandemic.



John Lustig presents an exhibit to a group of visitors at the Lockport Gallery.

Champaign-Urbana health care workers join AFSCME

More than 100 employees at the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD) made their union, CUPHD United/AFSCME Council 31, official in February after reaching majority support.

On Feb. 22, CUPHD United announced that an overwhelming majority of CUPHD workers were ready to form their union. CUPHD employees include public health nurses and nurse practitioners, dental hygienists and assistants, nutritionists, health educators, environmental health specialists, peer counselors, case managers, intake specialists, administrative assistants, accountants and more.

The organizing committee overcame an anti-union campaign from management, who attempted to intimidate the organizing workers.

“There was a lot of misinformation going around, and a lot of anti-union propaganda,” said Sheila Raila, a registered nurse who has worked for CUPHD for more than 20 years.

Raila said she and her colleagues have seen a lot of unfairness and unequal treatment, especially towards older employees.

In announcing CUPHD United in September 2022,

they wrote in an open letter that they are fighting for fair pay, transparency, and equal treatment on the job.

When they found out that their union had been certified, CUPHD workers were “over the moon” and eager for the possibilities that awaited their newly unionized workplace.

“We saw the potential for what can happen, we see that things can change and CUPHD can become a much better place to work,” Raila said. “It will be a better place not only for the employees, but for the community that we serve, too.”

A driving force behind CUPHD workers’ efforts to unionize was their desire to better meet Champaign-Urbana community’s health needs. They’ll have the ability to demand at the bargaining table the necessary resources they need to perform their jobs well.

Ruby Carpenter is a case manager counselor in the maternal and child health



(From left) Jennifer Enoch, Ruby Carpenter and Sheila Raila were all members of the CUPHD United organizing committee.

program who has worked for CUPHD for nearly 30 years. Carpenter got involved in organizing the union so that she and her coworkers could have a voice in the way their workplace operates.

Carpenter likened the union’s ability to help CUPHD’s workers to the care

they provide for expectant mothers.

“One of the things we know from years of working with families, is that if you can take care of the parents, the baby is going to be okay,” Carpenter said. “We have the opportunity do the same thing here. If you take care of the

employees, the level of care we can provide will be better.”

CUPHD United now begins the work of electing a bargaining committee to represent them in negotiations for a first contract, where they will demand fair pay, more transparency and equal opportunities for all employees.

Larry Marquardt Scholarship Applications Now Open



A tireless organizer and union leader, Larry Marquardt dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people. He was the first executive director of AFSCME Council 31, serving in that position until his death in 1980. In his memory, Council 31 established a scholarship fund which offers AFSCME members and their children financial assistance for higher education.

Apply by April 21

Visit AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships to apply



Mass hospitalization at Graham CC shows severity of offender drug problem

On Jan. 18, 18 AFSCME members and four other employees at Graham Correctional Center were rushed to the hospital after being exposed to a still-unknown substance. The affected employees experienced shortness of breath, nausea and headaches and came close to passing out due to the exposure.

Many of the workers were treated with Narcan, a life-saving opioid inhibitor used to reverse the negative effects of an opioid overdose.

Still, the Department of Corrections has refused to release its full analysis of the substance that sickened the workers at Graham, citing an ongoing investigation being done by the department.

Instead, the department issued a statement alleging that the substances “were identified as nonhazardous and should not have necessitated the use of Narcan or required hospitalization.”

AFSCME Local 2858 President Nick McLaughlin disputed that claim.

“We had at least four military combat veterans get taken to the hospital that day,” McLaughlin said. “These are not guys who get knocked off their square easily by seeing someone

else go down. These officers are the best of the best, and to say the substance wasn’t hazardous is just plain offensive.”

McLaughlin sees flaws in the prison leadership’s immediate response to the incident.

“These officers are the best of the best, and to say the substance wasn’t hazardous is just plain offensive.”

Since the incident, drugs have been discovered being smuggled into Graham at least 12 additional times. In each instance, the substances tested presumptively positive for synthetic cannabinoids.

At correctional facilities across the state, AFSCME members are contending with an alarming increase in the frequency—and brazenness—with which drugs are being smuggled

into the prisons. They say the department isn’t doing enough to protect correctional officers from potentially dangerous substances.


“I’ve never seen anything like this,” said Patricia Rensing, a Council 31 staff representative for several DOC union locals and previously a frontline Corrections employee herself. “It’s going on and the department is acting like it’s not even happening.”

While the workers hospitalized in the Jan. 18 incident have physically recovered, some are still experiencing lingering mental distress.

Local 2858 has begun filing grievances every time drugs are

discovered being smuggled into Graham, saying they create an unsafe work environment.

“That’s what’s great about this union,” McLaughlin said. “We’re not letting this issue die. The members see that.”

Council 31 has introduced several proposals in bargaining with the state of Illinois which would help keep drugs out of prisons and mitigate the risks to staff safety. 



Families unite to support Choate workers

After months of misleading media reports, Gov. JB Pritzker announced March 8 that the Department of Human Services plans to “repurpose” Choate Mental Health and Developmental Center in Anna, Ill., to serve specialized populations, in part by attempting to force more than 120 residents to move to other care settings.

Distorted press accounts had focused on several incidents of resident abuse over the past 10 years while ignoring the daily dedication of the overwhelming majority of Choate employees.

In announcing the plan to

force out the individuals with developmental disabilities who have called Choate home for many years, DHS asserted that “related improvements and upgrades will be made [to Choate’s facilities] to put the

building and grounds to the best possible public uses for many years to come.”

While there does not appear to be a plan to lay off employees, that can’t be certain until AFSCME Council 31 and the state have a “no layoff” agreement in writing. To protect the jobs of Choate workers, Council 31 was aggressively pursuing such an agreement as On the Move went to press.

Choate is a residential care center that is home to more than 300 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health issues. More than 450 members of AFSCME Local 141 work at Choate in clinical and administrative support roles.


The families of Choate’s residents are uniting in support of the valuable work they do.

In an open letter sent to employees at Choate on March 3, Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch and Rita Burke of the family advocacy group Friends of Choate wrote, “For years, you have made Cho-

“We know that when you come to work every day, you’re dedicated to doing everything you can to enrich the lives of all those who call Choate home, many of whom have complex needs which cannot be adequately met by smaller facilities in Illinois or around the country,” the open letter continues.

“We know [...] you’re dedicated to doing everything you can to enrich the lives of all those who call Choate home.”

ate a true home for so many of those in your care. You have sacrificed time with your own families working many hours of overtime due to the staffing shortages so that residents will always have support at the ready. And you have been family to those residents when their own families or guardians cannot be present.

Of great concern now to Choate employees and the families of Choate’s residents is the lack of viable alternative placements that can assure the well-being of residents. Council 31 will work with Friends of Choate to ensure that no resident will be forced to move out of Choate without the consent of their family or guardian. 

Support a responsible budget and adequate revenues for state and local governments

After nearly two decades of fiscal struggles, Illinois finally appears to be on a path toward fiscal stability. Demand for vital public services remains strong while workforce shortages place significant strains on the public service workers who strive to meet the needs of Illinois citizens. AFSCME will advocate for actions in the General Assembly that will strengthen public services, protect good jobs, and foster growth, including:

- ★ Support efforts to close corporate tax loopholes and oppose efforts to expand such unfair giveaways.
- ★ Support revenue-raising measures that would reinforce the progress made towards responsible budgeting, while opposing measures that would reduce income to the state.
- ★ Oppose any cutback to vital state services, facility closures, or layoff of state employees.
- ★ Support legislation that would expand the responsible taxing authority of local governments and oppose legislation limiting that authority.
- ★ Oppose any legislation that would undermine adequate funding for local government services, including but not limited to, any effort to reduce local governments' share of the income tax distributed through the Local Government Distributive Fund.

Support reforms to address staffing crisis in state government

The state of Illinois has an alarmingly high number of vacant positions—estimated at 8,000—across a variety of state agencies. This severe staffing shortfall is jeopardizing the quality of services provided to Illinois residents and damaging the health and wellbeing of current employees who struggle valiantly to fulfill the state's missions and mandates. AFSCME will:

- ★ Support reforms that will remove bureaucratic barriers that prevent hiring new employees or promoting current employees in a timely manner.
- ★ Lobby for the implementation of innovative concepts to better attract qualified applicants for state employment as well as retain its current workforce.

Support adequate funding for state universities/ equity for employees

Despite proposed funding increases in the upcoming fiscal year, state universities are still struggling to recover from decades of inadequate state funding which has resulted in substantial cutbacks at many campuses. Such cuts have led to employee layoffs, as well as making contract negotiations very difficult. AFSCME will continue to work in coalition with other unions, educational advocates and student organizations to:

- ★ Improve state university funding.
- ★ Work for pay parity between state university employees and state employees doing comparable work.
- ★ Oppose efforts to weaken State University Civil Service System rules that seek to ensure fair treatment of university employees.

Protect and expand workers' rights

Despite great progress in developing a framework of laws that seek to foster strong union rights, fairer policies, and safe working conditions for Illinois workers, many problems remain. Moreover, the corporate elite and right-wing forces have launched a massive and sophisticated nationwide campaign to drive down wages and destroy unions. Led in our state by the Illinois Policy Institute, these anti-union forces continue to press to weaken all laws that protect workers, whether in the private or public sector. AFSCME will:

- ★ Support all measures that improve workplace safety and reduce dangers that employees face on the job.
- ★ Support efforts to ensure that state funds are not used to block workers' efforts to form unions.
- ★ Fight any effort to weaken or diminish the collective bargaining rights provided to employees by Illinois state law.
- ★ Support efforts to expand collective bargaining rights to uncovered public employees while opposing any attempts to strip away collective bargaining rights from employees currently covered by the Illinois Public Employee Labor Relations Act or the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act.
- ★ Oppose any efforts to diminish workers' compensation or unemployment insurance benefits.

AFSCME's 2023 Legislative Agenda

Workers' rights, addressing the staffing crisis, improving DSP wages and more

Fight privatization of public services and assets

As the State of Illinois, public universities and local governments look to balance their budgets, all too often public officials are looking to privatize public services and assets as a way to save money without any regard for the impact on employees or the quality of services provided. Time and again, taxpayers suffer the consequences of these ill-conceived schemes. AFSCME will:

- ★ Oppose all legislation that would have the effect of privatizing any service currently provided by public employees.
- ★ Oppose efforts to weaken or repeal the laws that currently restrict privatization of any public services, such as the law prohibiting privatization of school district support services.
- ★ Oppose efforts to expand charter schools and press to ensure that available educational funding is devoted to public education.
- ★ Oppose public private partnerships that would open the door to privatization of essential public services.



Fight to improve wage levels in community disability agencies and other AFSCME-represented nonprofit agencies

Thousands of workers serving individuals with developmental disabilities in community-based agencies, as well as other human service providers, depend on funding from the state to improve wages. AFSCME has been leading the way in the fight for additional state funding earmarked for wage increases. Last year AFSCME helped win the fifth straight funding increase to help improve wages for direct support personnel in community agencies in three years. AFSCME will:

- ★ Support passage of legislation providing for a \$4.00 per hour wage increase for direct support personnel.
- ★ Press for adequate state funding to ensure fair wages for frontline workers in providing services in other human services agencies, such as those serving at-risk youth and the mentally ill.
- ★ Work for "labor peace" legislation to help organize new units in this sector.

Fight for affordable prescription drugs

Prescription drug prices continue to climb at inexplicable rates, forcing working families and retirees to choose between food, housing and life-sustaining medications. The cost of prescription drugs is not correlated to the actual cost of research, development or production by pharmaceutical companies and does not reflect the public subsidies, tax breaks, or taxpayer funds for research and development provided to these companies by government agencies. AFSCME will fight for the passage of legislation to address prescription drug affordability issues to the greatest extent allowable by the Illinois and U.S. constitutions.

Stabilize pension funds and oppose cuts to pension benefits/improve Tier 2 benefits

AFSCME Council 31, along with our union partners in the We Are One Illinois coalition, has successfully beaten back all efforts to slash the pension benefits earned by union members at the state, university and local government levels. But corporate forces have not given up on their efforts to strip public service workers of their retirement security. Efforts to advance an amendment to the Illinois Constitution to remove the pension non-diminishment clause still exist, while new, stealthier strategies are being launched intended to deceive public employees into believing that cutting pension benefits is necessary to stabilize the pension funds. AFSCME will:

- ★ Oppose any effort to amend the Illinois Constitution to remove protections against pension diminishments.
- ★ Continue to press for a solution to the pension funding crisis that is constitutional and ensures retirement security for public employees.
- ★ Oppose efforts to force public employees into risky defined-contribution retirement plans.
- ★ Oppose unconstitutional cuts to the pension benefits of employees or retirees in any public pension system.
- ★ Support legislation to address inadequacies and inequities in the pension systems.

STAFFING CRISIS CAUSES STRESS, TRAUMA & BURNOUT FOR DCFS WORKERS

In the previous edition, OTM reported on the devastating human toll that the staffing crisis in state government has taken on workers in 24/7 facilities in the Departments of Corrections, Human Services, Veterans Affairs and Juvenile Justice.

Council 31 recently conducted a web survey of workers in the Department of Children and Family Services, where understaffing is also dire. For a workforce that is tasked with protecting the welfare of children, the inability to meet the demands of the job due to understaffing can have heartbreaking consequences.

As of November 2022, there were nearly 800 vacant positions in DCFS. Meanwhile, the number of youth served continues to climb.

As the number of staff decreases, safety risks for remaining staff increase. For a job that already carries considerable danger, DCFS workers cannot—and should not—be forced to assume any further risks to their personal wellbeing.

“The unrelenting trauma and stress that DCFS workers experience on the job is only getting worse. It’s past time for state and department leaders to get serious about filling the hundreds of funded vacancies that exist in DCFS—for both the wellbeing of the people who make DCFS work and for the at-risk children they serve,” said Anne Irving, Council 31 Regional Director and the union’s liaison to DCFS.

AFSCME Council 31 has provided state officials with recommendations for ways to accelerate the hiring process and continues to keep the issue front and center in bargaining with the state of Illinois.

What follows is only a sampling of the alarming stories that DCFS workers shared in their responses to the survey.

“

If we have a report where the client has a history of violence it is better to go in pairs. We don't have enough staff to do that.

– Investigator

“

Running out on a new case before we know the family background because we don't have time to check and neither does our supervisor. All of it is unsafe, everyday!

– Investigator

“

I was left to sit overnight in the office after taking protective custody of a 9-year-old child unable to find placement. I was alone while an active threat by another client was occurring at the office. After asking for help due to not being safe, upper management provided no solutions or alternatives to me other than sitting at the office with a child and an active threat, and I was solely responsible for finding relief the following morning after being up all night...

– Investigator

“

Last week I didn't have a day off. I...worked the entire week, had on-call shift Friday & got called out, on-call shift Saturday and got called out and then had a sibling visit at the office Sunday. Then worked the entire next week. Also had overtime that week.

– Foster Care worker

“

My kids tell me I spend more time with other people's family and kids than my own. I feel I need to work after hours in order to get my normal functions of my job completed.

– Investigator

“

When you get 3-4 reports a day and you are driving all over 4-5 counties to see everyone you are only seeing the child at the onset of the report. I'm shocked more kids aren't dying right now. We have zero time to do quality work with the record-low number of Investigators we have.

– Investigator

“

It is not safe for Investigators to be going out to these homes by themselves. Families are already angry with you coming to their door, now you have a worker that can't protect themselves.

– Foster Care worker

“

My marriage has suffered, as I go days without seeing my spouse, and when I finally do, I'm usually distracted or exhausted. My spouse has witnessed me crying, shaking, hyperventilating like I'm having a breakdown, and it scares him and impacts his mental health as well.

– Intact Family Services worker

“

I deal with anxiety. I have nightmares of work not getting done. I do not enjoy my time off because I am too worried about what the next work day looks like or what hasn't been done.

– Investigator

“

My health is suffering...I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression this summer. Unraveling. I am constantly triggered and on the verge of tears daily. I'm burned-out and my medical team has recommended that I leave the field. My mind, heart and spirit are broken.

– Foster Care worker

State bargaining committee members speak out on importance of unity

The AFSCME state of Illinois bargaining committee is more than 200 strong, with every major state agency represented by committed local union leaders. Through the months at the bargaining table, the committee has remained united and committed to advancing the interests of the 35,000 state employees covered by the master contract. *On the Move* asked five members of the committee to share their thoughts on the progress that has been made thus far.

Jennifer Howard Local 2081

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

I'm a first-timer on the bargaining committee. Even though it's moving slow, we're making good progress.

I'm just learning how they dissect the whole contract and how we come up with the proposals, and how things are voted on for us to tackle with management.

It surprises me some of the proposals that management has come to the table with. They surprised me because they were so punitive in a climate where all state agencies need people to come work for them. We wouldn't agree to them. Really, I don't see how they would be able to retain future staff by being so punitive.

I feel good about the gains we've made thus far. As time goes on and we ratify the contract, I think the members are going to be excited and happy.



Ryan Gammon Local 203

CORRECTIONS INDUSTRY LEAD WORKER, CENTRALIA CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Of course, management always comes in with sometimes onerous proposals and my perspective is how quickly they have come off of some of the things that they're asking for. It seems like it's on par with the pace of the previous negotiations I've been on. I wasn't a part of negotiations with the Rauner administration, I can only assume that was much more difficult.



We've made some reasonable gains. In negotiations like this, AFSCME tends to make this consistent movement that has given us such a good contract overall in the past.

There's definitely a unified front across all of the agencies and departments. It seems like we have an unspoken understanding about not allowing management to pit us against one another.

Richard Coleman Local 2645

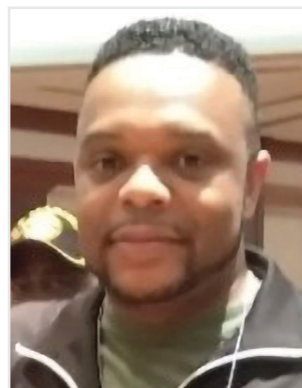
MENTAL HEALTH TECHNICIAN III, LUDEMAN DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER

It's my first time on the committee. So far it's been an emotional rollercoaster just to see how contracts are made. It has you sitting on pins and needles wondering what the next offer is going to be.

Mostly we try to be reasonable, as reasonable as we can be. We always try to figure out what management is trying to get at, and then we work it from there. But some of the stuff they propose is just unreasonable or impossible to do.

So far, I think we've made great strides. The most interesting part is going to be when we get to economics.

Everybody on this committee are good people. They all bring up concerns that no one person could have fathomed on their own because they're all from different departments and different parts of the state. I've learned that the issues are much bigger than just the facility I work at. But everyone is on the same accord and trying to make state agencies better places to work at.



Eric Lundt Local 2467

SENIOR SPECIAL AGENT, ILLINOIS GAMING BOARD

This is my second go-around on the committee. The enthusiasm Gov. Pritzker had for supporting state workers after his election seems to have waned a little bit.

I'm disappointed that the state has let over 8,000 state jobs go unfilled and not come up with a feasible plan to get our ranks fully back to the numbers they should be.

Not every issue is a parallel issue to someone else in a different department. But there is a sense of togetherness, brotherhood and sisterhood, because it's about the whole. One agency or one certain segment of state workers may have a need that's more than someone else's. The committee is trying to bring all the state workers up to a certain standard. And that's such a difficult job and yet they are doing it.




Jennifer Sloper Local 1964

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SPECIALIST 2, DOC SPRINGFIELD HEADQUARTERS

There's so much in the contract, so it's interesting to see the whole process of how it gets broken down. The give and take between sides. I think it's going really well, but it can be very tedious.

There are times where it moves quickly and there are other times when it moves really slowly.

The people in the room understand the whole point of the union is the solidarity aspect. Just because one department or agency might need something doesn't mean that we all shouldn't be pushing for it, and everyone really understands that. I really appreciate how much input we're able to give on what gets bargained for. I think it's super cool that we get the chance to voice our ideas. Every time someone gets frustrated with the process, I tell them there's plenty of union members out there who wish they could be in the room where their contract gets bargained. 



AFSCME Recommendations: 2023 Municipal, School Board and Library Elections

AFSCME Area PEOPLE Committees, comprised of representatives from local unions, have announced their recommendations for the 2023 municipal, school board and library elections happening across Illinois.

The committees arrived at their recommendations after examining voting records, reviewing questionnaires and conducting interviews to determine where the candidates stand on the issues that matter to AFSCME members.

Through that process, these candidates have emerged as people who will stand up for the rights of workers and share the values that are important to union members.

**Our votes can make a difference.
Early voting is open now through Election Day.
Election Day is Tuesday, April 4.**

Note – AFSCME does not typically endorse in uncontested races.



City of Chicago

Mayor – Brandon Johnson
4th Ward – Lamont Robinson
5th Ward – Desmon Yancy
6th Ward – William Hall
10th Ward – Ana Guajardo
11th Ward – Ald. Nicole Lee
24th Ward – Ald. Monique Scott
29th Ward – Ald. Chris Taliaferro
30th Ward – Ruth Cruz
36th Ward – Ald. Gil Villegas
43rd Ward – Ald. Timmy Knudsen
46th Ward – Angela Clay
48th Ward – Joe Dunne

East Moline City Council

Ward 1 – Kenneth Porter
Ward 2 – Jeffrey Deppe
Ward 4 – Adam Guthrie

East Moline School District #37

School Board (vote for 3) – Kimberly Dyer, Evelyn Denise Gay, Debra Faralli

Elk Grove Village Library Board

6-year – Emily Glimco

Fox Metro Water Reclamation District

District 5 – Chuck Nelson

Galesburg City Council

Ward 1 – Bradley Hix
Ward 5 – Heather Ziegler Acerra
Ward 7 – Steve Cheesman

Harvey

Mayor – Marshaun Tolbert

Homewood Library Board

At-large – Amanda “Jo” Grep
At-large – Thomas Popelka

Joliet

Mayor – Bob O’DeKirk
Ward 1 – Larry Hug
Ward 2 – Pat Mudron
Ward 3 – Sharon Sherri Reardon
Ward 4 – Rosa Hernandez
Ward 5 – Terry Morris

Moline City Council

Ward 7 – Anna Castro

Moline/Coal Valley School District #40

School Board (vote for 4) – Lindsey Hines, Jason Farrell, Ramona Dixon, Audrey Adamson

Niles-Maine Library District

2-year – Roberto Botello
4-year – Jason Trunco
6-year – Becky Keane
6-year – Umair Qader

Oak Lawn Library Board

At-large – Heather McCarthy

Orland Park Referendum

Shall the Village of Orland Park retain the managerial form of government?
YES

Peoria City Council

At-large – Michael Vespa
At-large – Clara Underwood-Foreman
At-large – Demario Boone
At-large – Bernice Gordon-Young

Rockford School District #205

A – Denise Pearson
D – Nicole Bennett
F – Kimberly Haley

Rock Island City Council

Ward 4 – Jenni Swanson
Ward 6 – Mark Poulos

Springfield

Mayor – Jim Langfelder
Ward 3 – Roy Williams, Jr.
Ward 4 – Ald. Larry Rockford
Ward 5 – Ald. Lakeisha Purchase
Ward 6 – Jennifer Notariano
Ward 7 – John Houlihan

St. Charles Library Board Trustee

At-large – Ali Lanthrum

Sterling

Mayor – Diana Merdian

University Park

Mayor – Joseph E. Roudez III
Clerk – Dorothy “Dee” Jones

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Members of AFSCME Local 3298 pose after voting to ratify a new contract for the 150 employees of the city of Aurora.

Zookeepers pay front and center in Peoria

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 3774 were fighting to get the fair contract that their 40 members in the Peoria Park District deserved, but management wasn't budging.

So members coordinated actions to pack consecutive meetings of the Peoria Park District Board of Trustees to demand a fair contract.

Workers at the Peoria Park District are responsible for maintaining nearly 9,000 acres of parkland, including a zoo, four public golf courses, a children's museum, miles of hiking trails, several playgrounds and more.

Two-thirds of the members of Local 3774, which represents employees across a number of city departments, came out to support the park district workers. Union members from the Teamsters and Carpenters unions, who also work for the city of Peoria, showed up to the Park District meetings to stand in solidarity with the AFSCME members.

Tim DeJarnett, an equipment service technician and the president of Local 3774, said there is no doubt that the actions they took at board meetings made a difference in the outcome of negotiations.

"We were all there holding up signs, so we were definitely noticeable," DeJarnett said. "So much so that when we went to the board meeting the second time, it was clear management was worried about it."

One of the key sticking points for the bargaining committee was the pay for zookeepers at the Peoria Zoo. Zookeepers are required to have four-year degrees and most have student loans to pay for those degrees. Zookeepers also have to go through

advanced gun training, because if an animal gets loose, it's their responsibility to tranquilize or eliminate it before it can harm the public. But their pay was not commensurate with the level of education and responsibility they had.

"Zookeeping is one area where you really don't want to have high turnover," DeJarnett said. "You need responsible, qualified people who know what they are doing. It's a matter of safety—and that's what we stressed to the board."

And their message was heard. By the final year of the contract ratified by Local 3774, the hourly pay for zookeepers at the Peoria Zoo will have risen by more than 100%, putting them more in line with zookeepers in their region.

Overall, wages for Peoria Park District employees were raised by 11.5% over the term of the three-year contract. Local 3774 also won an increase to clothing and boot allowances, while holding the line on health insurance costs.

The Local 3774 bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Regional Director Dave Beck, Staff Representative Tod Williams, DeJarnett, Kenny Lemon, vice president, Doug Holms, treasurer, Roz Wolfram, secretary, and Jared Smith, PEOPLE chair.

Local 3298 wins contract three years in the making

THROUGHOUT AFSCME Local 3298's three-year fight for a fair contract, members never stopped backing their bargaining committee.

Local 3298 represents more than 150 employees of the city of Aurora who work in the police department, animal control, engineering and more. They are a tight-knit local union. So when the city tried to reduce union rights as they bargained their most recent contract, it was a

non-starter for the bargaining committee.

"They wanted every member who discussed union business at work to submit that time down to the exact minute," said Michelle Velazquez, a 23-year fire inspector with the city of Aurora and the president of Local 3298. "Whether it was a single minute, we would have had to report it."

That demand was relaxed after the Local 3298 bargaining committee fought back. They ultimately won the right for paid union orientation and codified other union rights.

Throughout the three years of negotiations, the bargaining committee continued to meet as a group whenever they could, after work hours or

on weekends, strategizing and trying to find ways to turn the pressure up.

"Everybody was patient," Velazquez said. "We had a lot of support from our members. When we would ask for them to back us up, they did. It made a difference, and it was noted by management. That was key and it's appreciated. Sometimes the little things like that make such a big difference and it helps us all move forward."

All told, the bargaining committee won across-the-board raises of 10.75% over the life of the four-year contract, with 3.25% retroactive to Jan. 1, 2022.

"It definitely was not easy to get this contract," Velazquez said. "But there was always a light at the end of the tunnel."

The Local 3298 bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser, Velazquez, Vice President James French, Treasurer Ana Ruiz, Executive Board member and Chief Steward Jennifer Olman and Steward Tara LaFan.

"Sometimes the little things make a big difference."



Members of Local 3298 cast their ballots for a contract that took nearly three years to win.

Field Museum workers win union with AFSCME



Daniel Le, a member of the Field Museum Workers United organizing committee, delivers remarks at the union's announcement of majority support in November 2022.

Workers at the Field Museum in Chicago have officially won their union, Field Museum Workers United, with AFSCME Council 31.

Votes were counted on March 9 in a union election administered in February by the National Labor Relations Board. An overwhelming majority of workers at the Field voted Yes for the union.

"We're thrilled that our coworkers have decisively said yes to our union, Field Museum Workers United/AFSCME," the organizing committee wrote. "We also voted to form one bargaining unit for all Field Museum titles, because we know that we're stronger together."

The Field Museum is one of the largest natural history museums in the world, home to a collection of 24 million biological specimens and millions more natural and cultural artifacts from around the world.

The 300 new AFSCME members at the museum are collections assistants and technicians, associate curators, exhibitions preparators, registrars and designers, visitor service representatives, research scientists and assistants, and housekeeping staff, and many more.

The victory for Field Museum workers comes on the heels of other major organizing pushes at Chicago's cultural institutions. Workers at the Newberry Library and at the Art Institute of Chicago's museum and the nontenure

track faculty and staff at the institute's related college, have all recently voted to form their unions with AFSCME.

Anna Balla, a registrar for the botanical collection who has worked at the Field for 17 years, is a member of Field Museum Workers United's organizing committee. She was inspired to begin unionizing as she saw the wave of organizing at cultural institutions across the country.

"There's been a lot on social media recently about museums and cultural institutions organizing," Balla said. "The more I saw people talk about it, I felt like I'm not the only person who's feeling this way. I can't change anything by myself. It takes a community to create change."

Balla saw changes that needed to be made at the museum, especially during the pandemic, when Field's management announced that more than 100 workers would be either laid off, fired or put on unpaid furlough.

"I tried to fight for change, but with the pandemic, I realized I couldn't do it alone," she said. "I felt like I was going up against this big machine."

For NiQuan West, a second shift team lead in housekeeping, it was about being valued and respected for the sacrifices they've made over the years to the museum.

"A lot of us have been there for years and have given our bodies to the job," West said. "For us to not be compensated fairly for that, that's a big problem. I've worked here for 10 years, I shouldn't be taking out loans to pay for my bills. We're just asking to be treated fairly."

Organizers had to contend with an aggressive anti-union

campaign from the Field's leadership. High-dollar management lawyers were brought on and anti-union propaganda was spread throughout the museum.

Balla attended the vote count to witness the victory with her own eyes. She was nervous—as a member of the organizing committee, she had put a lot into this effort. She

had seen how hard management had fought against the union. But when the final tally was announced, she was elated.

"I just wanted to dance," Balla said. "Across the country, things are so complicated right now, workplaces are so frayed and chaotic. But there's this ray of sunshine, a little bit of hope

"When people get together, we have a say."

that things can actually work. When people get together, we have a say."

In the coming weeks, the new union members will begin the process of preparing to bargain their first contract, including electing a bargaining committee to represent them in negotiations and distributing a bargaining survey so everyone can share the issues that matter to them.

"We put up a hell of a fight," West said. "When the time came, no one backed down. Now let's stay the course and see it all the way through." 🦋



RETIRED COUNCIL 31 DIRECTOR RECEIVES CFL HONOR

The Chicago Federation of Labor announced in March that it would be renaming its annual Woman of the Year award in honor of former Council 31 Associate Director and current CFL First Vice President Rosetta Daylie (left), pictured here with Chicago Coalition for Labor Union Women President Katie Jordan. Daylie herself won the Woman of the Year award in 1990.

RETIREE NOTES

Understanding an Explanation of Benefits

IN JANUARY, SPRINGFIELD AFSCME sub-chapter retirees Garland and Lesley Stevens' health care provider billed them for two items which should have been turned into their insurer for payment. Had they not been comparing the bills to their insurance plan's Explanation of Benefits (EOB) documents, they would have been on the hook for an extraordinary out-of-pocket sum.

"While AFSCME works through negotiations and the legislative process to help us protect the benefits we earned, there is something we can do to protect ourselves when it comes to our health insurance," Garland said.

"Though it can be intimidating, everyone, especially seniors, should closely review provider statements and compare them to the insurance company's EOB mailings," Lesley added.

The Stevens are not alone. According to varying sources, anywhere between 30 to 80 percent of all medical bills contain errors. Whether it's during the initial appointment stage or in the calculation of the bill, the health care process goes through multiple people representing different organizations. This often leads to a "too many cooks in the kitchen" scenario that opens the door to mistakes along the way.

Understanding how to read the EOB document sent to you by your insurance company can be your first line of defense to protect yourself. It identifies how an insurance claim from a medical provider was paid on your behalf and how much you're responsible for paying yourself.

You should get an EOB if you have insurance you purchased on your own, a health plan from your employer, or Medicare.

A typical EOB has the following information, although the way it's displayed may vary from one insurance plan to another:

PATIENT

The name of the person who received the service (you or a dependent).

INSURED ID NUMBER

The identification number assigned to you by your insurance company. This should match the number on your insurance card.



Garland and Lesley Stevens of the Springfield retirees sub-chapter caught insurance overcharges by understanding how to read their EOB documents.

CLAIM NUMBER

This refers to the claim that either you or your health provider submitted to the insurance company. Along with your insurance ID number, you will need this claim number if you have any questions about your health plan.

PROVIDER

This may be the name of a doctor, a laboratory, a hospital, or other healthcare providers.

TYPE OF SERVICE

A code and a brief description of the health-related service you received from the provider.

DATE OF SERVICE

The beginning and end dates of the service you received. If the claim is for a health care provider visit, the beginning and end dates will be the same.

CHARGE (ALSO KNOWN AS BILLED CHARGES)

The amount your provider billed your insurance company for the service.

NOT COVERED AMOUNT

The amount of money that your insurance company did not pay your provider. Next to this amount you may see a code that gives the reason the health care provider was not paid a certain amount. A description of these codes is usually found at the bottom or back of the EOB. Insurers generally negotiate payment rates with the healthcare provider, so the amount that ends up being paid (including the portions paid by the insurer and the patient) is typically less than the amount the provider bills. The difference is indicated in some way on the EOB, with either an amount not covered, or a total covered amount that's lower than the billed charge.

AMOUNT THE HEALTH PLAN PAID

This is the amount that your health insurance plan actually paid for the services you received. Even if you've met your out-of-pocket requirements for the year already and don't have to pay a portion of the bill, the amount the health plan pays is likely a smaller amount than the medical provider billed, due to network negotiated agreements between insurers and medical providers (or in the case of out-of-network providers, the reasonable and customary amounts that are paid if your insurance plan includes coverage for out-of-network care and you've met your out-of-network deductible already).

TOTAL PATIENT COST


The amount of money you owe as your share of the bill. This amount depends on your health plan's out-of-pocket requirements, such as an annual deductible, copayments, and coinsurance. Also, you may

have received a service that is not covered by your health plan in which case you are responsible for paying the full amount.

Your EOB will generally indicate how much of your annual deductible and out-of-pocket maximum have been met.

In the case of Garland and Lesley Stevens, after checking the bill against the EOB, which didn't list the charges, they called their provider.

"The provider confirmed that we had been billed for 100% of the expense and that the items in question had not been billed to the insurance company," Lesley said. "We were told that the billing department would correct the problem on the next statement."

Catching billed errors prior to payment can prevent overpayments and reduce the need for problematic follow-up trying to get reimbursed for any overpayments. Make sure you are carefully reading your EOB documents so you can be prepared to identify and correct any overpayments. 



Rhonda Nesbitt

AFSCME Local 3096

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SPECIALIST

Tell us about your job at UCAN.

UCAN is a social service agency [in Chicago] that serves underprivileged youth. We have different programs—foster care, residential, teen parenting. We primarily work with youth between the ages of 17 and 21, and a lot of them have suffered some sort of trauma in their life. We teach them life skills so once they pass 21 years old, they can take those skills out into the community and build a life for themselves. We help connect them to job training and assis-

tance and enroll them in different programs to help them get their GED or high school diploma.

What do you like most about your job?

UCAN's mission statement says: "Youth that have suffered trauma can become our future leaders." I love that mission statement because I believe it. But getting the youth to believe it themselves can be the challenging part.

You work so hard trying to get families to get over obstacles and move onto something

better. Sometimes they receive the message, sometimes they don't. But as soon as you tell yourself, "Enough already," you find one person who needs you—and if you can help just one person, that makes it all worth it.

How did you get involved in your local union?

My father, mother and husband were all union members, but I had never been a part of a union before. I understood the idea, but I never truly understood how important they were until I became a member myself. Some of my coworkers—who have been working at UCAN for longer than I have—were making less than \$12 an hour. I couldn't believe it. We're dealing with traumatized and challenged youth, and the money wasn't matching the work we are doing. That moment opened my eyes. From that point on, I was all union all the time.

I've been a steward and the local treasurer for three years now. I try to help wherever I can.

We didn't have a treasurer at the time I came on and I wasn't sure about it. But whatever position you're taking on, AFSCME will train you and train you well. You can pick up the phone and call anybody and they'll help you.

How does your union help the people who work at UCAN?

We have a voice where management has to listen to our concerns. That's the joy of it for me. We get a chance to say, "Hey, we don't like this and we're going to give you an opportunity to correct it on our behalf." We can speak up when something doesn't feel safe. Whatever our concerns are, we can go to management and address it. Before we would go to management and they would just say, "Deal with it." Now, we can fight for what's right and what's fair. They have to listen to us—whether they like what we say or not.

What does solidarity mean to you?

It means thinking about more than just one person and acting as a unit. If everybody moves as one, if everybody as a group feels worthy enough because they're being respected on the job—being able to manage their finances, make a decent wage and feel appreciated—then everybody feels that way. It enables everyone to do their job better. We're all equal but we all have different skills and different ways of servicing our youth. But when you pull all those different skills together, everything works perfectly. 