

ON THE

# MOVE



**AFSCME members  
welcome summer at  
local park districts**

**PAGE 6**

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
AFSCME

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

**FINDING SOLIDARITY  
AT SIUE PAGE 3**

**DSPs LOBBY FOR FAIR WAGES  
PAGE 5**

**STATE CONTRACT CAMPAIGN  
HEATS UP PAGES 8-9**



**ON THE MOVE**

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

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director  
Mike Newman, Deputy Director  
Ben Conboy, Editor  
Julie Wildman, Designer

**COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS**

**Executive Director**  
Roberta Lynch  
**Deputy Director**  
Mike Newman  
**State Sector Executive Vice-President**  
Ralph Portwood, Local 1866

**Private Sector Executive Vice-President**  
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237

**Local Government Executive Vice-President**  
John Rayburn, Local 1215

**Secretary**  
Dave Delrose, Local 1028  
**Treasurer**  
David Morris, Local 805

**BOARD MEMBERS**

**State Conference Board Co-Chairs**  
Cheryl Graham, Local 785  
Tim Worker, Vandalia, Local 993

**REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS**

Phil Cisneros, Local 3969  
Safiya Felters, Local 2854  
Susanne Littlefield, Local 2912  
Kobie Robinson, Local 3835  
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

**REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS**

Terry Boone, Local 672  
Cody Dornes, Local 46  
Tom Opolony, Local 89  
Tawny Proulx, Local 172  
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693  
Miguel Vazquez, Local 3297

**REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS**

Arnold Black, Local 2971  
Shaun Dawson, Local 2073  
Elizabeth Hutson, Local 1019  
Jack Matthews, Local 1964  
Trudy Williams, Local 3433

**REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS**

Jerry Grammer, Local 1175  
Julie LaTempt-Brazier, Local 2887  
John Medley, Local 1805

**TRUSTEES**

Keith Kracht, Local 203  
Danny Williams, Local 29

**RETIREE CHAPTER 31 REPRESENTATIVE**

Larry Brown

Cover Photo: Local 791 members in the Joliet Park District construct a new playground at John Leach Park.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

**Building a better future**

*Passing on union values*

**PASSING THE VISION OF A BETTER LIFE FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT**

Every year Council 31 awards scholarships to graduating high school seniors based on their record of achievement and, perhaps most importantly, on an essay they must submit on what AFSCME has meant to their family.

These essays are always fascinating to read as they reveal the extent to which children absorb (sometime almost by osmosis) the values of their parents. Time after time over many years, we have read submissions from young people who provide very specific examples of the ways that being part of a union has made their parent's lives—and hence their own—significantly better.

When we speak of the “union difference”—higher wages, better benefits, improved working conditions—it's important to remember that this “difference” also can have a powerful impact on the quality of family life:

That's why it's so impressive to see how many AFSCME members make a very deliberate effort to ensure that their children understand the value of union membership and the importance of having a voice on the job.

By passing on a deep understanding of and solid commitment to the labor movement, the parents of today are helping to lay the basis for a stronger future for unions in our country in the years to come. And in doing so, they are helping to ensure a better future for their own children and so many others.

The essay submitted by one of our scholarship winners this year, Tessa Ashley, daughter of Leslie Ashley-McLean, a member of AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University, provides a compelling depiction of the ways that the vision of a better life based on greater fairness and equity can be passed on from one generation to the next. I share it here in the hope that it will encourage every AFSCME member to think about ways to instill in your children the labor movement's foundational principle that all work has dignity and deserves respect.

**Why the Labor Movement is Relevant and Needed More Today Than Ever!**

By Tessa Ashley

I think it has become more and more clear why the Labor Movement is needed today more than ever. Watching, over and over again, workers organizing while the highly paid billionaires make more and more money off the backs of their workers. It seems that rich corporate greed takes over and the “higher-ups” try very hard to shut down workers fighting for a living wage. I wonder why corporations work so hard to dissuade people from joining unions or organizing unions. If they didn't think unions were powerful, they wouldn't work so hard to stop them.

I've been raised in a proud union home. My mother is the chief steward for AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University. From a very young age, I often accompanied my mom to many actions related to her union. I also remember driving to Springfield to march at the Capitol during the budget impasse. Both my mom and my step-dad worked hard to help save EIU and help the many employees that were laid off during this time. It seems the union members across the state were working hard to save their own universities and help their workers.

Then came COVID. We were all stuck at home together and I witnessed my mom on Zoom after Zoom call fighting for her union members to have protective gear, safe working conditions and remote-work ability while the administration didn't seem to care about their safety.


Now I am witnessing the faculty at EIU actually on strike. While this is not her union, she is still on the picket line in sol-



TESSA ASHLEY

idarity. I can now say I've been a part of my first strike. It is so sad to watch this happening. I grew up with this university literally in my backyard. I always thought I would attend EIU, but listening to my mom, watching her friends and colleagues forced to strike for 6 days just for a fair and living wage, I committed to another university which appears to treat their faculty and staff in a fair manner. It's very sad when employees of a once-respected institution won't even send their own children there. I think that speaks volumes.

In addition, I plan to pursue a degree in education. I know that when I finish my degree and I am looking for employment, I will only take a job where I have a union to support me. I know teaching is hard work that I will love, but I also know that I need a union for better working conditions and for help negotiating a good wage. It seems public education is under attack right now and a union will help ensure that educators are treated with the respect they deserve while providing one of the most important services in our lives.

With corporate greed running rampant in our own country, it is so important, now more than ever, to have strong unions. I don't think it's fair or right that the rich administrators and corporate CEOs continue to make more and more money while their workers do more and more work for less money just so they can get richer. I feel the labor movement is relevant and important to protect the front-line workers, those who have made the rich people rich, from unfair treatment. We need unions to support these hard-working people. 



Building service workers of AFSCME Local 2232 hold a demonstration at SIUE.

# SIUE workers find solidarity in contract fight

*Building service, administrative staff join arm in arm for better working conditions*

**A** FSCME members at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville (SIUE) are learning that a rising tide lifts all Cougars.

Though they have different jobs, are represented by different unions and have different needs, the administrative staff of AFSCME Local 2887 and the building service workers (BSWs) of Local 2232 are spreading solidarity across campus, standing arm in arm to support each other's fights for better working conditions.

In all, 17 unions represent SIUE employees. Three—the two AFSCME locals and the non-tenure-track faculty—are currently bargaining contracts. But everyone shares the same goals: Improved pay, working conditions and staffing. As a result, where there once wasn't so much as communication or coordination, the unions have started working together to win fair treatment and respect.

"We're trying to foster solidarity. We have been talking to each other more now than our unions ever have," said Julie LaTempt-Brazier, the president of Local 2887 and an office manager in the Department of Theater and Dance. "Everybody tried to operate in their own unions, but now we've all started to realize that there's strength in numbers. The university needs to know we all stand together."

AFSCME members have begun coordinating joint actions with the other union

members. They've been leafletting outside university fundraisers and holding sit-ins, with more joint actions planned in the coming weeks.

"Every union is moving. It happened really fast," said Tyler Toussaint, a BSW of six years and a member of Local 2232. "It's very interesting, very exciting. It's sad that it had to come to this, but it's good that everyone has started working together."

**"People are working three jobs. It doesn't have to be this way."**

In the last year, 16 BSWs quit, but the university has only hired two to replace them. BSWs in AFSCME Local 2232 say they're at the same staffing levels as they were in 2000, but the floor area they're responsible for has grown by 600,000 square feet since then. Worse yet, high turnover leaves the more senior BSWs—people who can't afford to lose out on their retirement benefits by switching jobs—to pick up the slack.

The university just broke ground on a new nursing school, which BSWs point out will have much more advanced maintenance needs than other buildings on campus. That means more workers are needed to get the job done—but, current BSWs say, the university must substantially raise wages to attract them.

"It's been almost a year and a half without a contract," Toussaint said. "We need that money to take care of our families. It used to be okay; now we're barely hanging on. People are getting ready to lose their homes. People are working three jobs. It doesn't have to be this way."

While wages are the biggest issue in bargaining, the unions are also pushing for improved parental leave policies.

Rebecca Halford, Local 2232's treasurer, recently gave birth to a baby. She fell ill during her pregnancy and had to take time off. Her baby had to spend more than seven weeks in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. Rebecca ran out of parental leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act and was forced to return to work or risk losing her job.

"I feel cheated out of my time with my newborn because we have no real maternity leave that is not covered by FMLA," Halford said. "We've

asked management to put something in our contract the last two times we have negotiated. SIUE says they don't see a reason for it."

LaTempt-Brazier could easily find another job with her qualifications that would pay more. But that job wouldn't give her the sense of pride that she gets from serving the community she knows and loves.

"I'm a graduate of SIUE," LaTempt-Brazier said. "This is home for me. I started a family and I moved back here and got a job at this university. Things were a lot better 17 years ago. When I do leave this place, I want it to be better than when I found it." 🐾



Administrative staff of Local 2887 have been working with other unions on campus to win fair pay and better working conditions.

# Chicago eyes reopening shuttered mental health clinics

In 2012, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel decided to close half of the city's public mental health centers. The consequences of that disastrous decision have echoed throughout the past decade as historic disasters, like the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, sharply increased the demand for mental health services in Chicago.

AFSCME members and activists hadn't taken Emanuel's decision to close the clinics lying down. They met with elected officials, organized forceful actions and lobbied hard against Emanuel's plan, which primarily targeted mental health centers on Chicago's South Side in neighborhoods like Auburn Gresham, Back of the Yards, Morgan Park and Woodlawn.

AFSCME and allied community organizations also held powerful demonstrations. In April 2012, AFSCME Local 505 members—who work for the Chicago Department of Public Health which operates the mental health centers—dramatized the dire effects that clients would suffer from the closures by holding a mock funeral. That same month, individuals receiving mental health care at the Woodlawn Mental Health Center occupied

the building to protest Emanuel's draconian cuts.

At the time, Helen Morley—then a patient of the Beverly-Morgan Park clinic—said, “For me, my therapist is a matter of life or death, because I have no one and I am alone.” Sadly, she was right. Morley's clinic was shuttered in April 2012; she died in June.

Although Emanuel pushed for the closures in the name of cost savings, an AFSCME analysis found the plan would save just \$2 million, or 0.03% of the city budget.

“There were a number of therapists who were deeply invested in the clinics and their own clients,” said Jo Patton, who spearheaded the fight as Council 31's former director of special projects. “There were moving accounts of therapists who, off the clock, would drop by and see how a client was doing. That was partly due to the fact that these

were clients they had been seeing for many years.”

## Keeping the issue alive

Although Emanuel prevailed in closing the clinics, the issue didn't disappear. Instead, calls to reopen the city's mental health centers and expand public mental health services in Chicago have persisted, both because of the ongoing commitment to this fight and because the services provided by the city's mental health centers are more essential than ever.

Many individuals who relied on Chicago's clinics for their mental health care were left without access to treatment when they were closed, which led to higher likelihood of hospitalization in the areas where the centers were formerly located, according to a 2017 study by the University of Illinois at Chicago. According to a report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Illinois ranks 11th highest in the nation for the number of adults with mental illness, and the state has the third-highest rate of youth with severe depression.

Because of continued advocacy from AFSCME and community activists, elected

officials have revisited the policy choices made during the Emanuel years. The city created a Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) pilot program, which dispatches mental health professionals in response to 911 calls where a mental health crisis is reported. And this year's budget set aside \$6.3 million to hire 29 new employees to increase staffing at the city's remaining mental health centers.

In March 2023, the City Council passed the Human Service Workforce Advancement Ordinance, which was spearheaded by AFSCME, in an extraordinary 41-2 vote. The same month, the Chicago Department of Public Health announced it would be providing mental health services in select branches of the Chicago Public Library. Mental health clinicians of AFSCME Local 505 are staffing the program, which is available to all residents over the age of 13, regardless of their ability to pay, insurance or immigration status—just as the clinics once were.

## A new opportunity


Now, after a decade of uphill battles, the outlook for the

city's mental health centers and the people who depend on them seems even more promising, thanks to the election of Mayor Brandon Johnson and the most pro-worker City Council in recent memory. Throughout Chicago's 2023 municipal election cycle, Johnson campaigned on reopening Chicago's mental health centers and expanding a version of the CARE program.

“A strong public system of care keeps us all safer, keeps our city more livable, and reduces the costs of other services,” Johnson's mental health plan reads.

In his inauguration speech, Mayor Johnson again affirmed his commitment to reopening the clinics and strengthening mental health services.

“I want to make sure that no one ever has to suffer because they do not have access to mental health services,” the new mayor said. “And people have told us no for too long. It's a matter of life and death. [...] Let's get this right for future generations.”

AFSCME members and activists have kept an ember of this issue burning for more than a decade. Now, there's a new opportunity before the city of Chicago to right this wrong. 



AFSCME members, community groups and patients of the clinics staged demonstrations throughout the city to protest the closures of the clinics.

# DSPs lobby at State Capitol for fair wage increases

**D**irect support personnel (DSPs) and other frontline workers who serve people with developmental and intellectual disabilities gathered at the Capitol at AFSCME’s DSP Lobby Day as they pushed for a fair wage increase.

AFSCME members from community disability agencies in every corner of the state descended on the Capitol to talk to legislators directly, telling them in personal and powerful terms why the \$4/hour wage increases they seek are necessary—not just for themselves, but for the people they serve.

From daily personal care, such as assistance with eating, grooming and dressing, to teaching essential life skills and attending to complex medical needs, the work of DSPs can be physically demanding and emotionally draining. These workers make enormous sacrifices, and they deserve to be paid fairly for the important work they do. That’s the message they brought directly to lawmakers.

“Look at the cost of food, gas, rent, mortgage, insurance,” Veronica Lea, the secretary-treasurer of AFSCME Local 2690 at Trinity Services in Joliet, told reporters at a news conference. “Our pay is so low that people leave. They love their job but just can’t afford it.”

DSPs worked the Capitol like a team of the most seasoned lobbyists, tracking down and talking to legislators from districts near where they live and work.

Hearing these stories firsthand clearly made an impact on several of the lawmakers with whom AFSCME members spoke. After meeting with DSPs outside of the Senate chamber, state Sen. Christopher Belt, who represents parts of Metro East, made a commitment to support the wage increase legislation.

“For the work that you do, each and every one of you deserves a special spot in heaven,” Belt told the workers. “You can count me in. I’m on board.”

After years of neglect, the state has recently made important investments in disability services. But even though the current agency reimbursement has increased to \$17 an hour for DSP services, the starting wage at many agencies is barely above the minimum. This disparity exists because the state has funded increases

earmarked for DSP wages but has not always required community agencies to pass those increases through to workers.

That’s why the legislation supported by AFSCME and lobbied for by DSPs calls for strong language guaranteeing that the money is passed onto workers.


In recent years, low wages have forced many DSPs to look for work elsewhere, leading to a turnover rate of more than 50% and critical staffing shortages. The effect of this is two-fold: residents don’t get the level of care they deserve, and workers who remain are forced to work crushing amounts of overtime just to keep up with care.

“I would love to give more of myself. But we just can’t be everywhere all at once,” said Christine Rivera, a DSP from AFSCME Local 3492 at the Ray Graham Association in Lisle. “The people we care for deserve to live a quality life and have a safe environment to live in.”

Cheryl Kakuska, a DSP at Horizon House in Peru, Ill., and a member of AFSCME Local 1555, said that during the height of the pandemic, she stayed at work for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all to make sure that the at-risk residents she cared for stayed healthy and safe.

When Kakuska started her job as a DSP in 2019, she earned \$12 an hour. After negotiated raises in her union contract and pay increases secured through the legislative process by AFSCME, her pay is now up to \$17 an hour.

“But let’s be honest: it’s just not enough,” she said.

As On the Move went to print, the state legislature had yet to vote on the bills, SB 1600, sponsored by Sen. Celina Villanueva, and HB 3398, sponsored by Rep. Lakesia Collins. Both lawmakers are Democrats from Chicago. AFSCME’s lobbying team is shoring up support for the bills and ensuring that DSP wages are part of the conversation as the state budget plan is put together. Gov. Pritzker has proposed a \$1.50 hourly increase. 



Members of Local 3863 from Orchard Village speak with Sen. Laura Fine outside the Senate chamber.



Members of Local 1555 from Horizon House of Illinois Valley speak with Rep. Jackie Haas in the Capitol rotunda.



DSPs from Local 3492 from Ray Graham Association meet with Rep. Anne Stava-Murray on Lobby Day.

# Park district workers across Illinois welcome summer

The frost of winter has given way to a sea of green—the grass is growing, the trees have sprouted new leaves. In park districts across the state, AFSCME members are there to help shepherd the summer season in.

There's a lot of work to do: planting flowers, collecting dead tree limbs, making much-needed repairs to park buildings and more. Behind all those efforts are AFSCME members working tirelessly to make sure that their communities have a place to enjoy the many facets of the outdoors.

## Planting 10,000 flowers at breakneck pace in Springfield

When maintenance foreman Josh Milleville pulls up to Springfield's Lincoln Park in the early hours of the morning as the sun is just starting to rise, he looks out at its rolling hills and beautiful water features, and he feels something: pride.

"It's just so peaceful," said Milleville, the president of AFSCME Local 2050 at the Springfield Park District. "You get to go outside and work all day out there. And you just think to yourself, 'Today is going to be a great day.'"

For the members of Local 2050, there's a lot to do in the spring. At the Springfield Zoo, caretakers are hard at work welcoming the animals out of hibernation. At the golf courses, landscapers and maintenance crews are diligently preparing the greens and sand traps for public use. Cracks are being patched and surfaces are being acid-washed at the park district's public pools.

Allen Glossop has been a gardener foreman at the Springfield Park District for 16 years. He and his team of six other gardeners plant, grow and tend to Edwin Watts Southwind Park's annual program of 10,000 flowers. They start planning out the program—deciding which flowers to plant and where to plant them—when winter still has its icy grip on the park.

Throughout the winter at Southwind Park, everything the gardeners do is in

preparation for the mad dash that starts at the first hint of spring. Their flower program has a strict planting schedule that they adhere to with a military-like rigidity. If every one of the 10,000 plants in their program isn't in the ground by Mother's Day, they'd feel like they failed the public. (It's a deadline they've never missed.)

But apart from all the stress that comes from tough deadlines and long hours under a beating sun, Glossop firmly believes he has the best job in the world.

"Being outside all day and working in the gardens, it's almost like therapy for me," Glossop said. "Finding fulfillment in serving others, to me, is what AFSCME is all about."

## A whirlwind of maintenance and prep in Joliet

With 65 parks in their care, members of AFSCME Local 791 in the Joliet Park District have a lot of green space to clean up before schools break for summer and families begin to flood the parks.

They're also racing to get ready for the park district's



An AFSCME member waters flowers at Edwin Watts Southwind Park's greenhouse in Springfield.

signature annual summer event, Taste of Joliet, which kicks off on June 23. It requires a small army of AFSCME members to prepare the grounds to welcome thousands of visitors and hundreds of vendors to Joliet Memorial Stadium for a weekend of food, drinks, music and fun.

"It's a very chaotic weekend, and we're there to do all the essential work for it," said Eddie Guzman, the president of AFSCME Local 791, which represents 50 employees of the Joliet Park District.

Since Guzman began

working for the park district 20 years ago, they've built 25 parks and are constantly making improvements to existing ones to improve safety and accessibility—not to mention fun. John Leach Park, a new playground featuring all the hottest equipment, is currently under construction.

For the members of Local 791, being able to work for the enjoyment of their community is a gift in itself, Guzman said.

"Being able to see smiles from kids playing on the playground and parents thanking

us for doing a good job, you know you're really doing something for the city of Joliet."

## Local 1514 keeps America's pastime alive for Aurora

It may be difficult to see with the naked eye, especially at the pace a normal baseball game is played, but a baseball diamond takes a lot of abuse over the course of a Little League season. Batters dig their sharp cleats into the clay in the batter's box and the repeated force generated from a pitcher's wind-up tears up the mound.

Diego Villanueva sees it all. A maintenance worker II in the city of Aurora Park District and a member of AFSCME Local 1514, Villanueva spends a lot of time making sure that Aurora's baseball fields are up to standard.

Before games started this spring, he and his coworkers undertook the large project of completely replacing the clay on several diamonds.

"We have to groom [the clay] every day to make sure it doesn't get hard between all the dry heat and rain," he said. "We like to keep it nice and loose for the players."

Between tending to the clay, striping the foul lines and mowing the outfield, maintaining the baseball fields is a daily task for Local 1514 members.

"We take pride in everything we do," Villanueva said. "I want to make it presentable for people to come enjoy it. I think we all find pride and joy in that." 🌿



Members of Local 2050 make repairs to Springfield's public pool before summer begins.

# Hiring bureaucracy must change to address staffing crisis

**S**hort-staffing crises have emerged as a national issue, affecting state and local governments of every size nearly everywhere. In Illinois, one solution to the problem is clear: Fix the hiring bureaucracy.

An Economic Policy Institute study found that 44 of 50 states are still below pre-pandemic levels of state employees. All of those states are sitting on billions of dollars in federal American Rescue Plan funds earmarked for the recovery of state and local governments.

State and local governments never fully recovered from the Great Recession of 2008–09. Public-sector employment stayed below pre-recession levels through the 2010s as

policymakers disinvested in public services.

As of December 2022, there were 450,000 fewer public-sector workers than before the pandemic. Meanwhile, private-sector employment has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

Understaffing takes a harsh toll on current employees who are often forced to work excessive amounts of overtime. In Illinois, AFSCME has been pushing for changes to Central Management Services (CMS) hiring protocols

to reduce the amount of time between when an applicant applies for a job and when they start that job.

Ron Hudson, a Council 31 labor relations specialist who works primarily on issues in the Department of Human Services, said the main culprit of slow hiring is a bureaucratic approval process that requires sign-off from


caseworker in DHS, it takes between six and nine months from the time they apply to the time they start on the job,” Hudson said. “If you’re someone who needs a job, would you wait around for six to nine months waiting to hear back? No. You’d go find another job.”

CMS recently changed a policy that used to allow the

a new employee. As a result, a process that should take a few days at most can be dragged out for weeks.

In another case, a current AFSCME member at a DHS facility bid on a job at the same facility at which he currently works. In effect, all he would be doing is switching from third shift to first shift. What followed were months of delays and an endless stream of questions gone unanswered.

After four months of repeatedly following up to ask about the status of his bid, he was told that there had been turnover in CMS. They promised that the issue would be solved in “a few weeks.”

AFSCME continues to push for reforms through every available avenue, including at the bargaining table and through the legislative process. 

“If you’re someone who needs a job, would you wait around for 6 to 9 months waiting to hear back?”

several people in several departments before an offer is extended and an applicant can begin employment.

“For a human service

hiring department to sign off on a new employee’s start date and salary. Under the new policy, CMS must manually accept the start date and starting salary for

## How the staffing crisis damages workers’ family lives

No one should have to choose between their job and their family. Unfortunately, for many AFSCME members, that’s a choice they’re being forced to make every day that passes without substantial action toward hiring adequate staff.

Sometimes they’ll be detailed to another workplace hours away for weeks at a time. Sometimes they go to work early in the morning and work long hours of mandatory overtime, returning well after their children’s bedtimes. They miss graduations, birthday parties and games.

What follows are reports from AFSCME members in the Departments of Children and Family Services, Human Services, Corrections, Juvenile Justice and Veterans Affairs, sharing how the staffing crisis has strained family life.

*I have been detailed to another office twice this year. I missed friends and family get togethers, birthdays, and that also impacted my family and spouse by deferring almost all household responsibility to them.*  
– Investigator

*My kids think work is more important than them.*  
– Mental Health Technician

*I recently became divorced due to this job.*  
– Mental Health Technician III

*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

*Being detailed to another office and having to stay in a hotel and away from family for six weeks is not acceptable nor is there pay compensation for being gone 24 hours a day.*  
– Foster Care worker

*I’m on [the] verge of divorce due to excessive mandates over the last few years.*  
– Mental Health Technician III

*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 have been mandatory detailed to another office twice now. By getting detailed I have missed out on my kid’s extracurricular activities and events.*  
– Investigator

*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.*  
– Correctional Sergeant

*My family life at home is being affected including my marriage by the amount of hours we are having to work and the stress of the job with the high caseload sizes.*  
– Foster Care worker

*I no longer work for DCFS. I constantly found myself working late nights. Or if I was on-call I barely slept in case the phone rings. As a single mother with limited support, I had to walk away. I couldn’t be away from my kids for long periods of time, as I am the only caretaker for them.*  
– Former DCFS Investigator

*My office has been detailed to cover an entire extra county which has created 40-50 extra cases a month to handle on top of being short staffed. The long hours spent working overtime to manage the caseload has caused a strain on everything in my life and I rarely get to be home in time to eat dinner with my family.*  
– Investigator

*Sometimes I feel like all I do is work, come home to sleep, [and] go right back to work again with no real break in between. Definitely stressful and causing strains on my personal relationships.*  
– Day Care Licensing Representative



# STATE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS HEAT UP



The AFSCME State of Illinois Bargaining Committee has been at the bargaining table for months now. With no clear signs that the Management Bargaining Committee recognizes the importance of the work that state employees do, union members are beginning to take more forceful actions to secure a fair contract.

On April 17, AFSCME members throughout the state stood up to show solidarity with their bargaining committee and make their fight for a fair contract visible to management. Wearing green stickers emblazoned with “Fair Contract!”, AFSCME members from dozens of state locals brought their contract activism directly to their workplaces. The following week, they began papering their desks, cars, worksites and homes with “Fair Contract!” signs.

---

**“We’re going to have to keep fighting just like we always do until we get what we deserve.”**

---

Union members are also taking to social media, posting on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter using the hashtag #WeMakeIllinoisWork.

The current master contract expires on June 30. Negotiations have been ongoing since early this year.

The initial rounds of negotiations focused on expanding job rights, as well as common-sense proposals to address the understaffing crisis. While some progress was made on those fronts, there are still big differences remaining.

Now that the parties have also exchanged economic proposals, the differences have grown exponentially.

Union bargaining committee members have been shocked by the administration’s unwillingness to acknowledge the sacrifices that state employees have made over the past four years, the ongoing stress they face on the job due to understaffing, and the negative impact that inflation has had on their take-home pay.

“We’re putting fair proposals out there and being met with resistance,” said Dan Jackson, the president of AFSCME Local 2794 and a military maintenance engineer in the Department of Military Affairs. “What the state is offering is nowhere near what we need.

The inflation rate has been through the roof. We’ve lost ground and we need to make it up.”

Just as disturbing to state workers is management’s proposal to drastically increase health insurance costs and make it more difficult for employees and their families to access the health care they need.

Christina Carter, a member of the bargaining committee from AFSCME Local 38 at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, said she found management’s health insurance proposals “concerning.”

“If our health care costs would increase the way management wants them to, we’d be working to pay for health care,” Carter said. “We can’t provide for our families that way.”

On top of that, management wants changes that could force employees to work even more overtime, despite the fact that thousands of state employees are already working dangerous and damaging amounts of overtime now.

## Ramping up

In the coming weeks, local union leadership will be organizing workplace rallies, setting up phone banks to directly reach AFSCME members known to be working remotely, and more.

Members of the Bargaining Committee said that it will take the involvement of all AFSCME members to win this fight.

“The Bargaining Committee is the voice, but it will take the actions of all members that will ultimately help negotiations move forward,” said Arnold Black, a public service administrator in the Department of Children and Family Services and the president of Local 2971. “We need to show management that we all stand together in solidarity to fight for what’s right for all state employees.”

“AFSCME always fights,” said Cody Dornes, the president of AFSCME Local 46 at East Moline Correctional Center. “We’re going have to have to keep fighting just like we always do until we get what we deserve.”



**FAIR CONTRACT!**

Local 3436 • State Parole Agents



Local 2645 • Ludeman Developmental Center

Local 472 • Sheridan Correctional Center



Local 993 • Vandalia Correctional Center



Local 51 • Illinois State Employees, Peoria



Local 141 • Choate Mental Health Center



Local 494 • Pontiac Correctional Center



Local 2794 • Marseilles Training Center

# AFSCME members find purpose in early childhood education

*Head Start programs strengthen the futures of children and parents*

**J**en Sims knows what it's like as a parent to struggle to find the energy to read a storybook or visit a playground when you're worrying about where your family's next meal will come from.

A member of AFSCME Local 900 and a Head Start teacher in Urbana, Sims was once in the shoes of many of the families she sees now. A lot of them have fallen on hard times and are struggling to keep their heads above water. The simple pleasures of a child's early development become luxuries that parents can't afford.

"Having been there, I want to read those books and love on these kids," Sims said. "I can tell [the parents], 'I was once where you are. With our resources, I'm going to try to help improve things for you.' It carries more weight when you've been there."

Head Start is a federal program that provides early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and families. The program was launched in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson as part of his Great Society campaign.

Today, AFSCME is fighting in Congress for an increase of nearly \$5.5 billion to sustain and support the Head Start workforce. But House Republicans are threatening to roll back federal investments to 2022 levels in their debt ceiling bill, likely cutting programs like

Head Start by about 22% or more.

"We can't let that happen," said Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. "The Head Start program has changed life's course for so many children. We urgently need that to continue."

Numerous studies have found that children who attended Head Start programs have better outcomes than similar children who did not. Children in Head Start have been found to have higher high school and college completion rates and earn higher incomes.

While the program is focused on children, the outcomes for parents are just as positive. One 2015 survey of Head Start participants found that 90% of parents said that the program helped them keep or get a job. Ninety-nine percent of parents said it helped them improve their parenting skills.

Every day, Sims teaches children aged 3-5 who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Even as toddlers, many of them have experienced damaging trauma.

The macro effects of Head Start are measurable and



Head Start teachers of AFSCME Local 1058 in Rockford.

overwhelmingly beneficial. But for Sims, it's the little victories, the milestones reached by baby steps, that make it worth it: When a student finally figures out how to pour a glass of milk without spilling it; when, after lots of trial and error, they figure out how to build that block tower just the right way so it won't collapse; when they grow just a quarter-inch so they can finally reach the sink.

"You get to see a little lightbulb go off in their head when they learn to do something they've never done before," Sims said. "At their age, almost every experience they have is one they are experiencing for the very first time. They're simple things, but for them they

are huge achievements."

Kristen Hughes, a Head Start teacher and the chair of the Head Start Chapter of AFSCME Local 1058 in Rockford, said she has witnessed the huge strides her students take from the day they enter the classroom. One student who came into the program at 3 years old was almost completely nonverbal. He didn't know how to socialize with the other students, and was reluctant to play with anyone. But after months of building his confidence up in the classroom, he started to make progress.

"Now he smiles. He laughs. He's making plans with other students about how their cars will go down the ramp they set

up," Hughes said. "That's a good feeling, to see that progress has been made over the course of this year."

Hughes has been a Head Start teacher for 23 years. It's always been difficult to find and retain staff for the program. But now with the staffing crisis in public education, Hughes sees that problem getting worse.

"I wish the whole world would look at teaching as important as it should be," Hughes said. "The crisis with teaching staff is across the board and is hitting us too. With the crises that we're in, I hope somebody will step up and say, 'We better start treating these people better.'"



Jen Sims, a member of Local 900 and a Head Start teacher in Urbana, reads to her students.



## WELCOMING MAYOR JOHNSON

AFSCME members in the city of Chicago celebrated the inauguration of fellow union member and new Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson.

# Peoria library workers fight for fair contract

*Embraced by community, library workers take action for what's right*

**A**s members of AFSCME Local 3464-3 have been fighting for a fair contract for more than a year now, they've found in themselves a commitment to take action for what's right, and in their community, allies ready to fight alongside them.

Peoria Public Library employees make between \$4-9 an hour less than other comparable libraries in their region, depending on position. Many of the workers have advanced degrees, and they took their jobs with the library because they wanted to make a difference in people's lives. But so far, the library's negotiators haven't been willing to recognize their dedication.

"One term that has been thrown out in library world a lot is 'compassion fatigue,'" said Karla Wilkinson, a librarian who sits on Local 3464-3's bargaining committee.

"Compassion fatigue happens because we care so much about the lives of the public. And it is so difficult to do that when you're not being valued for your work, especially when we sit at the bargaining table and have management say, 'Well, of course we care about the staff.' Then their offers to us are pathetic."

Jacob Roberts is a reference assistant at the library. At 25 years of age, he has two bachelor's degrees and three young children. He provides his family's primary income. At one bargaining session where wages were being discussed, one manager tried to justify their lackluster proposal by telling Roberts, "You can't discount the benefits."

"And I said, 'You can discount them when you can't afford them. I can't afford them. My family is on government assistance,'" Roberts recalled. "That really shook them."

About 30,000 of the city's 110,000 residents are library card holders. Library workers hear all the time how much the community values the services they provide. Lately, members



Members of the state of Illinois bargaining committee walk the picket line in Peoria.

of the community have started to take action alongside AFSCME members.

Library patrons and their families have shown up at union pickets to support the fight for fair wages and have spoken out to the City Council. Now, the local press has taken notice and community organizations are beginning to get involved to support the workers.

"I think it's been really amazing to see how many people are willing to take time

out of their day, when they have kids and jobs, to come show support for us," said Katy Bauml, a reference assistant and Local 3464-3's secretary. "You can see that this is so important to them that they will take time off work, get a babysitter, and come out here on their own time to support us."

With the members of the community squarely on their side, Local 3464-3 is beginning to turn the heat up.

When the union picketed

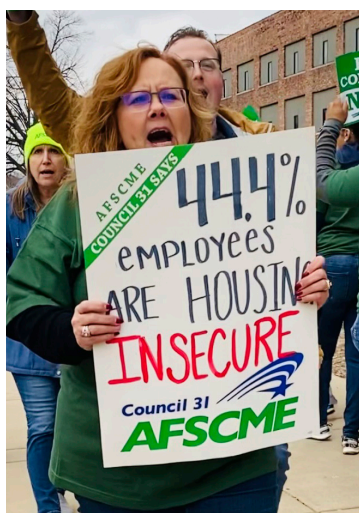
outside a library board meeting in March, the community turned out and was joined by AFSCME members from the State of Illinois Bargaining Committee who were in town for a meeting. Employees know their message was heard, because they could see the library director watching the picket from a second-story window.

Next, the library workers are planning to take their fight to the Peoria City Council. Workers see the library administration as unwilling to advocate for funding that it needs; over the past 12 years, the library's budget has remained stagnant.

"We attended a City Council meeting early on, when they were finalizing the budget," Wilkinson said. "They were talking about how they have such a surplus, they are just flush with cash. Nobody from library administration was at that meeting to hear that."

One resident wrote to the City Council that she was "appalled" to learn about the library's unwillingness to compromise in negotiations with library staff.

"Please consider reallocating funds in the city of Peoria budget to properly pay the library staff," she wrote. "I am asking you to intervene so that these negotiations are not delayed any longer than they already have been [...] I stand behind the library workers and urge you to do the same."



Library workers, community members and other AFSCME members from across the state picket outside a meeting of the Peoria City Council.

# Whiteside Co. health workers determined to win fair contract

**W**hen Northwestern Steel and Wire Company closed its Whiteside County steel mill in 1998, 10,000 union steelworkers suddenly lost their jobs—and their health insurance.

It was the Whiteside County Health Department that stepped up to make sure that their health needs would be met, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay.

Twenty-five years later, AFSCME members in the health department are carrying on Whiteside County's legacy of union activism.

The 90 employees of the public health department who formed their union with AFSCME in December 2021 have been at the bargaining table for more than a year. Stephanie Stichter, an RN and a member of the bargaining committee, said they formed their union because they want a bigger voice on the job and better communication between administrators and workers.

Stichter has been with the Health Department for more than 20 years, and in that time has helped it grow into a service that is truly there when people need it. Employees pride themselves on providing

care whether or not a person has the ability to pay.

"I care about the department and our clinic," Stichter said. "I watched it grow from being a single building to being this amazing entity that was grown and built for this community."

But she sees the department's new administration as wanting to run their public service more like a corporation. Longstanding programs have been cut. There's more emphasis on revenue and less on providing the best care possible for the underserved people of their community. The administration has started sending patients' bills to collections, a practice that would have been unheard of just a few years ago. Meanwhile, several administrators received raises between 30-40%.

Those misplaced priorities and management's slow going at the table led the public health workers to mark their one-year bargaining



Public health workers at the Whiteside County Health Department picket outside a meeting of the county board.

anniversary with a large picket outside a meeting of the Whiteside County Board of Commissioners on April 18. The demonstration called attention to the administration's glacial pace of bargaining, along with the unfair treatment and targeting that union organizers have faced

from administration.

"The message we brought to the county board was that we need them to tell the administration to stop stalling and cancelling our negotiations," Stichter said, referring to frequent instances when management has called off bargaining with little notice then refused

to reschedule in a timely manner. "The union is here and it's time to get a contract done."


Through the pandemic, Whiteside County public health workers were there when their most vulnerable neighbors needed them the most. Many

**"The union is here and it's time to get a contract done."**

residents had nowhere else to turn for care when Covid-19 raged.

"As public health workers, we stepped up to protect our community through the pandemic, despite the risks to ourselves and our families," Stichter said. "We deserve respect, fair treatment and fair pay—not these endless delays."

Meanwhile, the public health workers aren't losing sight of their mission. In fact, they're more determined than ever.

"I stay determined because I still believe that the community needs our clinic and our services and still needs to have professionals who will see people who are underserved or don't have insurance," Stichter said. "We will always be there no matter what." 



## IDOC LOCAL PRESIDENTS HONOR FALLEN CORRECTIONS WORKERS

The presidents of Department of Corrections local unions attended the department's annual Memorial Wall ceremony, where they paid respects to correctional officers who died in the line of duty.

# ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

## DSPs at Pathways win wage increases

WHILE AFSCME IS FIGHTING in the Illinois General Assembly for more funding for workers' wages at community disability agencies, members of AFSCME Local 38-B at Pathway Services in Jacksonville are winning better pay at the bargaining table.

Their new contract includes an immediate \$1.75 hourly raise for all bargaining unit members, and a further \$0.75 an hour in each of the next two years.

Another big victory for members comes in the form of improved rights under the scheduling policy. Before, management had the right to detail employees to temporary shift changes—often for extended lengths of time, disrupting their family and personal responsibilities outside of work.

Local 38-B's new contract makes clear that management can only move someone to a temporary shift for 14 days or less.

"We're very proud of this contract," said Angelica Muffick, Local 38-B's chief steward and a member of the bargaining committee. "It's a very big deal for our members and it makes them feel more valued, like they matter a bit more."

The new contract also boosts employees' starting paid time off balance from two weeks to three weeks, and adds a slew of new and increased wage premiums for working weekends, overnight shifts, and in specific job classifications like medication passers, nurses, and maintenance workers.

Local 38-B's bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Joseph Jay and included Muffick.

## Local 3096 contract strengthens union rights at UCAN

THE PRESIDENT OF AFSCME Local 3096 at social service agency UCAN in Chicago, Lynette Kincaid recently started to hear from members



The housekeeping and maintenance staff at UCAN were officially welcomed into Local 3096 with the ratification of their new contract.

of the agency's housekeeping staff. They had seen the advances that the AFSCME members who work directly with the agency's clients had made, and the protections afforded through their union. Housekeeping staff wanted those things for themselves.

The housekeeping and maintenance staff are subject to ever-increasing workloads. They witnessed the communication structure that the union had set up with management that allowed AFSCME members to voice their concerns. They had no similar structure of their own through which they could discuss workplace issues. They organized and won recognition, and with the local's new contract, they were officially brought into the AFSCME fold.

In the final agreement that Local 3096 members ratified, they increased the size of their bargaining unit to include 11 new titles, including the housekeeping and maintenance staff, certain case managers and specialists, and more.

Housekeeping and maintenance staff were first in line to vote yes, Kincaid said.

"They were excited because they had finally won justice," she said. "They were just so happy to finally be a part of the union."

The local won a one-time bonus of \$250 for everyone in the bargaining unit and improved rights around PTO. Many workers at UCAN have amassed large quantities of time off, and now they have the right to turn some of their unused days into cash. The

new contract also includes new language that requires management to negotiate with the union about how any rate increase the organization receives from the state is disbursed to workers. In the past, those rate increases have translated into wage

increases of between \$3,300 and \$10,000 per member per year.

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen and included Kincaid, Rhonda Nesbitt, Fernanda Royal, Derrick Kent and Gene White. 🐾



## Art Institute Custodians Show Solidarity with their Bargaining Committee

As their bargaining committee has been at the table for more than a year bargaining a first contract, building maintenance workers show their support by wearing Art Institute of Chicago Workers United gear and stickers.

# SHORT REPORTS



At a demonstration outside the museum on April 26, Museum of Science and Industry workers demand an end to the anti-union tactics they are facing from management.

## MSI employees file for union election

EMPLOYEES OF THE MUSEUM of Science & Industry filed union representation petitions with the National Labor Relations Board in Chicago.

The May 10 filing will trigger a union election in the coming weeks in which the employees can vote to formally certify their union, Museum of Science & Industry Workers United (MSIWU) with AFSCME Council 31.

"We're excited to move forward with our next step toward winning our voice at MSI," the workers' organizing committee wrote to their colleagues. "We're forming our union for pay equity, professional development, zero tolerance for unfair and discriminatory treatment, improved health and safety protocols, and a voice in the decision-making processes

that affect us."

In a clear sign of employees' strong support and enthusiasm for forming their union, MSIWU's election filing came less than a month after the organizing campaign was announced publicly on April 12.

On April 26, workers held a news conference outside the museum, asking CEO Chevy Humphrey to agree to five principles for a free and fair organizing process. Humphrey refused, instead continuing to engage in an anti-union campaign that among other tactics includes posting large placards with anti-union misinformation in employee breakrooms.

MSIWU will represent about 140 employees in the museum's guest experience, guest operations and education departments.

MSI employees are part of a historic wave of cultural workers who have recently formed unions with AFSCME, alongside colleagues at the Field Museum, the Art

Institute of Chicago and its school, the Newberry Library and the Notebaert Nature Museum.

## TV and movie writers' union on strike

TV AND FILM WRITERS WHO belong to the Writers Guild of America (WGA) have been on the picket lines since May 2 after 97.8% of members voted to authorize a strike as film studios refuse to compromise on key sticking points at the bargaining table.

Every three years, the WGA negotiates a new contract with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which includes studios like Paramount Pictures and NBC Universal, and television producers like ABC, Fox and Amazon.

The entertainment industry has undergone a

transformation in the last decade due in large part to the proliferation of streaming services. In the past, a successful TV show would often run for more than 20 episodes in a season, guaranteeing work for writers for most of the year. Now, most shows produce fewer than 15 episodes in a season.

As a result, according to the union, the average television writer's pay has declined by 23% after adjusting for inflation. The average film writer's pay has declined by 14%.

The union presented a series of proposals aimed at addressing these industry shifts, but the studios outright rejected many of them.

Key issues for the writers include improved pay for residuals and safeguards against the looming threat posed by artificial intelligence-generated scripts. The union also wants requirements establishing minimum staffing levels and "duration of employment" terms

to be added to their contract, which would require all shows to be staffed with a minimum number of writers for a minimum amount of time. The studios are resisting all of these proposals.

The WGA strike was ongoing when *On the Move* went to press.

## Starbucks workers won't bow to anti-union campaign


THE STARBUCKS WORKERS United union drive is one of the biggest organizing pushes in recent years. Workers are demanding a base wage of at least \$20 an hour, affordable health insurance and consistent scheduling, among many other priorities.

So far this year, the union has filed for elections at 57 Starbucks stores with more than 1,500 workers. In total, workers at 300 Starbucks stores across the country have won union elections since 2021.

In April, AFSCME and dozens of other labor and civil rights organizations signed a letter to new Starbucks CEO Laxman Narasimhan, urging him to "create and build a healthy working relationship with unionized partners" and encouraging him to affirm workers' right to organize by committing to bargain in good faith with union members.

But Starbucks corporate is putting up an extreme anti-union campaign. Starbucks recently fired Lexi Rizzo, a union organizer in Buffalo who worked at one of the first stores to unionize. Rizzo said management told her she was fired for being late to clock in, but every instance cited was fewer than five minutes late. Starbucks Workers United said she was fired in retaliation for being a vocal union supporter and organizer.

The retaliation is widespread. In Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood, Starbucks suddenly closed a recently unionized store just four days before workers were to begin bargaining a contract.

The National Labor Relations Board also found that Starbucks illegally fired a barista at another Chicago location because he had been discussing unionizing with his colleagues. The NLRB ordered the company to reinstate him with backpay. 

# RETIREE NOTES



(From right) AFSCME Retirees Liam McDonnell, Carolyn Gillman and Don Todd join Citizen Action Illinois and legislative allies to celebrate the passage of HB 3957 in the state House.

## Retirees get active in municipal elections

AFSCME RETIREES IN COMMUNITIES across the state got active in the April municipal elections, doing everything they could to help elect candidates who will stand up for retirees and working people.

“The media helped increase attention in the mayoral election in Chicago,” said Mary Jones, president of the City of Chicago Sub-chapter 60. “But turnout for the municipal elections in April remained low, with only one-third of registered voters casting a ballot. Us retirees have been trying for years to educate communities across the state about the importance of taking part in local elections—whether that’s through volunteering your time and efforts, or by just simply voting.”

While election turnout fluctuates based on competitiveness and voter interest, there is a persistent pattern of low participation in local elections. Despite this, local elections have a profound effect on the daily life of communities, impacting everything from schools and parks to housing,

transportation, and police.

Seniors continue to be the highest-participating population in municipal elections. Many AFSCME retirees took part in this year’s elections by phone-banking or knocking on doors in an effort to get out the vote and educate voters about candidates who will fight for the working class.

“Our members wanted to support the candidates they believed would stand with all working members and retirees, and bring in new ideas to address the issues facing our cities, counties, and school boards,” Jones said.

## State legislation to address Rx price gouging

WHEN A FEDERAL STUDY BY the Government Accountability Office looked at the prices of 1,441 generic drugs, it found that more than 318 of them had more than doubled in price between 2010 and 2015.

Drugs that have three or fewer manufacturers operate in monopolistic markets, allowing manufacturers to charge high prices for generic and off-patent drugs, despite

patents and other exclusivities having ended.

That’s why AFSCME has joined Citizen Action/Illinois and other allies supporting House Bill 3957 to stop price-gouging of generic and off-patent drugs.

The bill defines price-gouging as an “excessive” increase that’s “unduly burdensome to consumers.”

HB 3957 would give the Attorney General the power to investigate price increases. If found to be in violation of the law, a judge may require manufacturers to give rebates to consumers, to lower the cost of the drug to pre-gouging prices, or even to pay a fine of up to \$10,000.

As of the time On the Move went to print, both chambers of the state legislature had passed the bill. The legislation now awaits the governor’s signature, who is expected to sign it into law.

## Medicare funding under strain

A MARCH 31 REPORT BY the Medicare Trustees found that “projections indicate that Medicare still faces a

substantial financial shortfall that will need to be addressed with further legislation.”

The report recommends that “such legislation should be enacted sooner rather than later to minimize the impact on beneficiaries, providers, and taxpayers.”

“We support strengthening Medicare’s financing without shifting costs to beneficiaries,” said Max Richman, president of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM), “by broadening the number and types of prescription drugs subject to price negotiations, ending pay-for-delay deals and other gaming by pharmaceutical makers.

“In addition,” Richman continued, “we support Medicare legislative proposals in President Biden’s FY2024 budget that would extend ... solvency by asking the wealthy to pay their fair share of Medicare payroll and investment taxes.”


The trustees did find some positive news. Solvency has improved by 11 years from the date projected before enactment of the Affordable Care Act. The ACA reduced the rate of increase in provider payments, phased out overpayments to Medicare Advantage plans and

increased Medicare payroll taxes for high-income individuals and couples.

Unfortunately, Medicare continues to face financial challenges due to the demographics of the large Baby Boomer population that is becoming eligible for program benefits, prescription drug prices that are in many cases still too high, and overall health care inflation.

As a result, some loud voices like Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley and Senator Rick Scott of Florida have called for increasing the age of eligibility—a huge benefit cut for all seniors.

“People say the following: We can do it either through benefit cuts, tax increases or raising the full retirement age,” said Boston College Center for Retirement Research director Alicia Munnell told CNN. “There’s no third option—there are only benefit cuts or tax increases. Raising the full retirement age is a mechanism for cutting benefits.”

In contrast, AFSCME agrees with the NCPSSM: We should continue to implement reforms included in the ACA and the Inflation Reduction Act that would slow cost increases while promoting access to health care. 



he retired, he became a rep for the Laborers. I think being a union activist is in my blood. My dad taught me that standing up for fair treatment is important, and that you should never be afraid to stand up for what's right,

what's equal. I think my dad would be pretty proud to see me now.

### What's the importance of building solidarity?

Solidarity all goes back to one person is not going to be able to get anything alone. But if you have everybody together it shows that they are demanding these work conditions and these benefits, if everyone gets on the same page, then you're a force to be reckoned with. If it's just one person, management can wash it off as, 'Oh, they're just a troublemaker.'

I want us to be a force to be reckoned with. And I also have a desire to make this a better workplace with better working conditions. In order to do that, we have to be on the same page. We all have to be united. That's the whole point of a union to me.

---


**“A lot of us feel like the union is our second family.”**

---

### How do you build solidarity within your local?

It's up to us to make sure people feel seen and valued. We do a monthly newsletter where we highlight our members who have gone above and beyond, or try to help someone out who has been struggling. Next month we're highlighting a CO who stopped 150 pills from getting into the jail, and another CO who saved an inmate's life. We just want everyone to feel like they're being recognized for the good work they do, because we don't always get a pat on the back from anyone else. It's up to us to make people feel special.

Last year, one of our colleagues died of cancer and he left behind three small children. So our local pulled together to throw a Christmas party for his kids, where we had Santa come out and we all gave them gifts. That's the thing about our union: We may bicker like siblings, but when someone falls on hard times, we all step up.

A lot of us feel like the union is our second family, so we try to play that role. We try to do everything we can to live up to that. 

# Amy Bandy

## AFSCME Local 3369

WILLIAMSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE,  
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER

### Tell us about your job in the Williamson County Sheriff's Office.

I've been a correctional officer in the county jail for 15 years now. My mom was a police officer, and I went to school for criminal justice. I always knew I wanted to do something in public safety.

I like to try to make a difference. Sometimes it can be miserable. The people who are in custody are there at the lowest point of their life and I like to think I can make some kind of difference to them.

As a correctional officer, you wear a lot of different hats. You become a parent, a teacher, a counselor. Sometimes it can feel like a very thankless job. People in the community want the

bad guys locked up, but they don't think about the fact that there's someone spending 40 hours a week with those bad guys, and what that takes.

### How did you first get involved in your local union?

I've always been the person who is never afraid to speak my mind to management. So, it was a natural fit to get involved in my local. Over the years, I've been the vice president and have served on the executive board, but when the president position was open, I just felt like it was my time to serve. I stepped up and I've never looked back since.

My dad was the president of his Laborers' local at Southern Illinois University, and after