



# ON THE MOVE

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SAFE PAGE 11





**ON THE MOVE**

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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Out of many, we make one strong union**

*The coronavirus may be our toughest fight*



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

**KEY TO OUR SUCCESS IS TRANSFORMING DIFFERENCES INTO AN ASSET**

**T**ough times test even the strongest bonds. A union's strength is in its solidarity. For us in Illinois, these aren't empty words. We've fought and won the hardest battles because we've stood together, no matter how stiff the opposition or how long the odds.

Think of those in both political parties who tried to wipe out the pension plans that are essential to our retirement security. Along with our allies in the We Are One Illinois coalition, we fought them all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court and won, twice.

Think of Bruce Rauner, who tried to take away our bargaining rights, impose his demands, even wipe out our union. But we won every legal battle, gained legislative support for restoring lost wages and drove him out of office.

Our success in those fights and others was rooted in the unity and loyalty that are the hallmarks of our union. Members from one end of the state to the other came together to participate in lobby days and call-in days, rallies and marches. We knew that winning wasn't about hot rhetoric and empty threats; it was about having the facts to back up our case, being on solid legal ground and garnering public support for the rightness of our cause.

Now we face the coronavirus pandemic, an opponent none of us saw coming. In many ways it may be our toughest fight, and it's not over yet.

COVID has brought challenges in waves. From the earliest days of the pandemic, our union's focus has been on protecting members' health and preventing the spread of this deadly virus. Too often we had to battle tooth and nail just to get appropriate PPE and safety protocols put in place. Yet for all the progress we made, we still saw thousands of members become sick with COVID and some who died from it.

That's why when vaccinations against COVID became available early this year, we launched an all-out effort to encourage everyone to get vaccinated. The vaccines are safe,

highly effective and the best way to protect ourselves, our families and our communities from illness, hospitalization and death.

As a result of this combination of effective workplace safety measures and widespread vaccinations, by spring the numbers of COVID cases in our state—and in our workplaces—had decreased dramatically.

After more than a year of social isolation and social distancing—of remote union meetings and postponed union gatherings—we began to reconnect with a wide array of picnics, parties, parking-lot cookouts, movie nights and days at fun parks.

After all those months of struggling to negotiate contracts via Zoom, lobby legislators via text, and hold virtual pickets, we were back at the real bargaining table and out on the streets when necessary with picket signs waving. Things were definitely looking up.

Then along came the Delta variant! The number of COVID cases began to steadily rise again. Hospital ICUs once again began to fill up, and sadly, the numbers of deaths increased too—overwhelmingly among the unvaccinated.

In response to these developments, employers across the country—both in the public and private sectors—began to turn to employee vaccination requirements as an essential tool in a multi-faceted COVID containment strategy.

These increasingly common efforts by employers to require, or mandate, that employees get vaccinated is without a doubt an issue that AFSCME members feel strongly about. And some of those strong opinions are very different from one another.

But a fundamental aspect of our union is that every member

has a right to be heard. Solidarity does not mean that we always agree. But it does mean that we hear each other out and respect each other.

For instance, many of our members work in public health departments at the local or state level; they have been working tirelessly for months to promote the vaccine. Others work in nursing homes which came under a nationwide vaccination mandate from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. And many of our retirees feel passionately about the importance of getting vaccinated because they are seniors who are at especially high risk.

On the other hand, many members still have questions or concerns about the vaccines. Other members have medical or religious grounds on which they object. Still others simply don't like the employer telling them what to do.

All of this is why our union has been clear from the outset: Rigid, universal and punitive vaccine mandates are the wrong way to go. Flexibility, education and encouragement are the better path. As we go to bargaining tables to discuss the details of vaccine requirements with various employers all over the state, those are the principles that guide us.

Within Council 31, one of our greatest strengths is our diversity. We are from cities, towns and rural areas. We are every race, gender and age. We work in many different jobs providing a vast array of different public services. That's what makes us uniquely effective in all the fights we take on.

In other words, the key to our success is transforming our differences into an asset. Out of many, we make one strong union. That's how we beat the pension-slashers. That's how we kept our numbers up when the forces behind the Janus case tried to undermine us. That's how we retired Rauner.

Our opponents would love nothing more than for us to be distracted and divided. But I know we can overcome any challenge ahead if we come together, in unity, AFSCME strong.



# Cook County employees win contract

*Agreement comes after months of negotiations during pandemic year*

**A**fter bargaining late into the night of June 22, negotiations for a new contract for 4,000 Cook County employees were interrupted when a fire forced everyone to evacuate the downtown Chicago building at 3 o'clock in the morning.

But the bargaining committee, made up of some 50 representatives from 13 local unions, was undeterred. They moved to another building and continued bargaining. After more than 24 hours at the table the committee reached a tentative agreement with the county that morning. Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle came to congratulate the team on their new contract.

"This was a massive undertaking and a real team effort," said Deputy Director Mike Newman who led negotiations for AFSCME. "The committee came together, they cared about each other and were fighting for one another's issues. In addition to annual cost-of-living increases, we were able to restructure the pay plan so that every single AFSCME member got a significant pay

**"When we stand and fight together in solidarity, we can make real progress for both union members and the people we serve."**

bump that's equitable across the board."

The intense final day of bargaining capped more than eight months of negotiations in which the union firmly resisted management's take-away demands.

The fight escalated June



Cook County employees in 13 local unions won a new pay plan with increases for every AFSCME member.

10 when hundreds of AFSCME members took to informational picket lines at the county hospital and criminal and juvenile courts buildings, drawing media attention and making plain to management that county workers wouldn't

back down.

"The lesson is clear," said Newman. "When we stand and fight together in solidarity, we can make real progress for both union members and the people we serve."

The ratification vote

held June 29 overwhelmingly affirmed the settlement with 98% voting yes. The contract covers universal issues for AFSCME members at the county as well as unique terms for different offices covered in 11 separate agreements.

## VOICES FROM THE BARGAINING TABLE

**Teesha Coleman**  
President of Local 3696  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT,  
COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT

"I'm proud of the whole contract. We kept fighting and we never gave up.

"I've been with the county for 33 years. The majority of our members have been there more than 20 years and we've been stuck in the same step for ten years. So for us the extra 4% longevity boost we secured is huge.

"It feels wonderful having this kind of outcome. If it was not for the union, management would be able to have their way with us. We're very vocal at AFSCME. We're not passive. We don't play no games. We're union strong."

**Lawrence Wayne**  
President of Local 3692  
SERGEANT, COOK COUNTY JAIL

"I was most proud of holding insurance increases in check. We won't be paying more toward our medical benefits until 2023. And we will get a raise at that time, which will offset those costs. AFSCME members will see the increases from the new pay plan, the bonus and the COLAs before seeing medical costs go up.

"I've been at the county for 29 years and this

is my third contract negotiation. It was a bit of a struggle to get the money where we need it, but the county really showed that they are recognizing us for the things our members went through in this pandemic.

"Cook County jail was ground zero for COVID in Chicago. A lot of people got sick and a couple employees passed away from the virus. It was tough on us; it was tough on our families. And you have no choice because you're doing it for the safety of the residents of Cook County."

**Phil Cisneros**  
President of Local 3969  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT,  
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC GUARDIAN

"This is one of our best contracts in my 28 years. Mike Newman, our chief negotiator, did such a great job. Because of the new pay plan structure, everyone's getting an upgrade rather than just a few.

"The last day of negotiations lasted over 24 hours and included having to switch buildings due to a fire. The experience brought back a lot of emotions. This was my second time being in a fire at 69 W. Washington. On October 17, 2003, three of my co-workers passed away in a fire. I'm here today because of going down the west stairwell instead of the east stairwell. Our office takes it very seriously when we have those fire drills."

**Melinda Barrett**  
President of Local 2060  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT,  
COOK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY OFFICE

"This is a good contract. Everyone will get a substantial raise.

"In our local, it was hard to keep people because there was a huge disparity in pay between some employees despite them doing the exact same work. So our local negotiated for 19 people to be reclassified and upgraded so that all of them are on the same grade.

"We were formidable. We didn't let go. We said, 'Let's reach for the stars,' and we got them. It felt good. This is a win for everybody. Now morale will be better, and we won't have as much turnover. We had so many people reaching out thanking the bargaining team for achieving this equity. I am really proud of that."

**Lloyd Marshall**  
President of Local 3477  
PROBATION OFFICER, COOK COUNTY  
JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

"We stayed resilient and determined to come up with a fair contract. We went into this with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4.



# Educational employees win summer lifeline

*AFSCME-led lobbying effort carries the day for unemployment benefits*



AFSCME members at Rockford Public Schools helped each other apply for summer unemployment insurance.

**O**n June 25 Governor JB Pritzker signed House Bill 2643, making non-instructional educational employees—in school districts, universities, and other settings—eligible for unemployment insurance during the 2021 summer months.

For decades, these educational employees have been denied unemployment benefits when they are effectively laid off in summer. Pre-pandemic, they were often able to find other work, sometimes even with their own employers. But once the pandemic hit, those temporary job opportunities all dried up.

So last year AFSCME launched a campaign to help these employees make it through the summer in a time of virtual economic shutdown. The business lobby fiercely resisted because the state's

Unemployment Trust Fund is woefully underfunded. But the union's intensive lobbying effort succeeded in securing the benefits at that critical time.

With no real improvement in summer job prospects this year, AFSCME once again pushed for legislation to provide UI benefits to noninstructional education employees. And once again, thanks to an intensive member grassroots lobbying campaign, the legislation passed, extending an income lifeline to these workers.

## AFSCME members react

**Dino Cohoon**  
Local 981 Chief Steward  
FOOD SERVICES EMPLOYEE,  
EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

"We're all ecstatic. It's been a godsend for us. Summer unemployment benefits enable us to keep our livelihood.

"The calls to legislators went well. To generate calls we got the word out on Facebook. If we don't push, they won't hear our voice and we're not going to get anywhere.

"The people on the other end of the line at the Department of Employment Security have been super nice, happy to help you out. As far as I know, nobody has had any problems. It's wonderful that AFSCME members are the ones helping us out. They've been excellent."

overwhelmed and overjoyed to see this happen again.

"I'm so grateful for AFSCME for showing us how we can move mountains and I believe we can move this mountain permanently so we can have the choice to get unemployment every summer. Thank you to all our members who made those calls, thank you for working as a team."

**Brenda Erixon**  
Local 38 President  
RESIDENTIAL CARE WORKER,  
ILLINOIS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

"There's been a lot of pressure and stress from the pandemic, as individuals, families and in our workplace. One of those stresses is that we only get paid when students are in session. And with the shutdown, we didn't have the opportunity to earn the overtime needed to cover any of the non-school days like winter, spring and summer breaks.

"Everybody was scrambling. It's hard to get a job you'll only be able to work a couple months. After an entire year of stress and pressure, then it was constant turmoil waiting to see if summer unemployment insurance was going to play out.

"Thank God for Council 31 and our local. Just as our union fought for us to get COVID

**Sandra Patlan**  
Local 692 Vice President  
PARAPROFESSIONAL,  
ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS


"As a union, we are a family, and we work together as a family should. If you want something bad enough, you've



AFSCME Local 981 members at Eastern Illinois University: Greg Coffey, Amy Saunders and Dino Cohoon.

got to work as a team to push it through and make those phone calls, many times.

"AFSCME members pushed it. We moved mountains for bus drivers, food service, paraprofessionals and other educational staff. Now, people who wouldn't have jobs have money coming in for the summer. I'm

pay, we really came together at AFSCME for summer unemployment. We put pressure on our legislators to vote for this and at the end of the day we won. Our staff, we're probably between 100-120 people. That's a lot of families that are affected just in our small rural town of Jacksonville." 


## VOICES FROM THE BARGAINING TABLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3.

understanding that they were going to come after the insurance so we fought back to minimize the impact on our members.

"With Mike Newman and the bargaining team steering and keeping us focused, we were able to stay realistic and stay strong. The job actions at the different worksites showed

management that we were serious about getting a contract. After we did the job action, they wanted to settle at the very next negotiation date.

"In addition to keeping the health insurance down and getting decent cost of living increases, we got a \$2,000 bonus plus an extra \$1,000 pandemic pay bonus. That makes this one of the best, if not the best, contracts we've ever had." 



# COVID soars again— Delta variant strikes hard

The pandemic seemed to finally be subsiding as spring arrived this year, but since the emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus, the situation has been steadily worsening.

Delta is currently the predominant strain of the virus in the United States and according to the CDC is one of the most infectious respiratory diseases seen by experts. It's twice as contagious as previous strains and makes up more than 83% of cases in the U.S.

Vaccines have proven to be the most effective way by far to protect against the coronavirus and its variants, reducing infection and preventing hospitalization and death.

About 97% of people hospitalized from COVID-19—and

**“Vaccines are the most effective way to protect against the virus and its variants.”**

99.5% of those who are dying from it—have not been vaccinated. An unvaccinated person is about 50 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than a vaccinated person, and nearly 300 times more likely to die if infected.

The vaccines are safe and effective. About 63% of all Americans who are eligible to receive the vaccine have gotten at least one dose.

“That’s why AFSCME is participating in member and public education efforts to inform and motivate hesitant people to get the vaccine,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said.

## Rigid mandates won't work

But AFSCME opposes coercive vaccine mandates that threaten termination or other punitive measures against those who do not get vaccinated.


The alarming spread of the Delta virus has pushed an increasing number of employers to turn to “vaccination mandates”—requiring that all employees get vaccinated by a set date. Employers argue that

fact-based education efforts have not been sufficient to move all employees to get vaccinated, greatly increasing the potential for COVID outbreaks in the workplace.

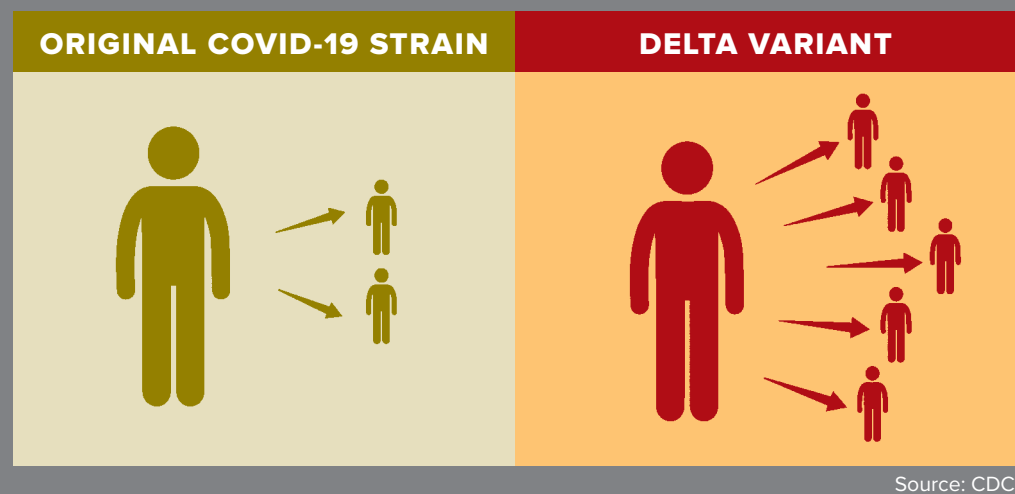
Dozens of employers in the private sector—most recently and prominently United Airlines—are taking this path. And public sector employers have begun to follow suit. The University of Illinois has issued a vaccine mandate for all employees, as have several other state universities. The State of Illinois issued a mandate only for employees who work in congregate settings. And both the City of Chicago and Cook County have also indicated that they intend to issue some form of vaccination mandate.

AFSCME Council 31 opposes rigid universal vaccination mandates. While employers have been found to have the legal right to establish such policies, labor law in our state and many others also requires that they bargain with unions over the impact of the policy on employees. AFSCME is using those negotiations to drive home the point that a rigid vaccination mandate would cause a host of problems, including exacerbating already existing morale and staffing issues.

As *On the Move* goes to press, negotiations regarding mandates are underway with some of the state’s largest public employers, including the state of Illinois.

In negotiations with the state, AFSCME has pointed out some agencies have been lax in their implementation of safety measures that can help to limit the spread of COVID. Without putting such protocols in place, COVID will continue to spread as it is well documented that even individuals who are vaccinated can be infected with the virus if they are in situations where it can readily be transmitted. For instance, in the Department of Corrections, offenders are not required to wear masks and are permitted to have visitors who are unmasked as well. 

The Delta variant is more contagious than previous strains. It may cause more than **2X** as many infections.



## Corrections officers save lives on the road



AFSCME Local 472 members Karle Eccles, Matt Roth, Stephen Fanti and Nate Roberts acted as first responders on the scene of an accident, helping save a woman's life.

In an unlikely coincidence, two different sets of AFSCME members came upon life-threatening car crashes this summer. Both groups of corrections employees leapt into action to save the lives of the passengers involved.

On June 1, after completing their shift at Western Correctional Center, AFSCME Local 3567 members Jake Swan and Jon Wessel were on their way home from work when they came upon an accident on the highway.

“We carpool every day,” Officer Wessel said. “We were cruising along; Swan was driving and I was messing on my phone. There was a pickup truck stopped in the road, and we saw a semi-truck behind it off in a ditch on the other side.”

Officer Swan jumped out of the car and ran right up to the pickup where he saw the driver was badly hurt. “I called 911,” Wessel said, “and told them there were serious injuries. There were people medically trained behind us, and we shared our gloves.”

Having so many first responders at the scene was a fortunate happenstance. Officers Swan and Wessel helped until further medical treatment arrived. Although the injured man lost most of his left arm, he

is alive and recovering thanks to swift intervention.


On June 25, another accident occurred—right in front of AFSCME Local 472 members Stephen Fanti, Nate Roberts, Karle Eccles and Matt Roth who were transferring an inmate from Sheridan Correctional Center to Hill Correctional Center.

“A Nissan veered off into the median and rolled six times,” Roberts said. “We managed to stop within ten feet of the crash. I got out and ran to the car. The two in the front were banged up pretty good because the air bags didn’t deploy.”

Roberts told them not to move in case there was a spinal injury.

“The young woman in the backseat, her hip to her mid-thigh was ripped open,” Roberts said. “I couldn’t open the doors but found a towel and put pressure on her leg and stayed there until EMS showed up. I talked to her to keep her calm.”

The ambulance and fire department came and extracted the passengers. The two men were taken to a hospital by ambulance and the young woman by a life-flight helicopter.

“When we got back to Sheridan, Nate was covered in blood,” Local 472 President Stephen Fanti said. “He was holding this young woman’s leg through the rear driver’s side window, his body was half in, half out because the doors were stuck. He acted as a first responder. He truly helped save this woman’s life.” 



# Union, community unite to protect Niles public library

*Direct action by new AFSCME members and allies blunts looming cuts*



Union members protest cuts with the community at a Niles library board meeting on July 20.

One day after a July 20 rally when some 200 AFSCME members and community supporters spoke out against threatened cuts to library staff, services and hours in the suburb of Niles, north of Chicago, the library board approved a budget plan that avoids the worst of the cuts.

The board's about-face was directly instigated by the immense public outcry. Besides the rally, which garnered extensive media cov-

maintain a valuable community space and resource. But within just a few weeks, this new Board majority has made it obvious that they do not

**“Once we realized we weren’t being offered a seat at the table, we pulled up our own with AFSCME.”**

erage, nearly 2,000 people signed a petition to the board and dozens testified in support of library employees and services.

Library employees who recently organized their union with AFSCME helped drive the grassroots effort to save the library, along with allies like the Niles Coalition.

## Organizing for change

The library workers came together in the wake of proposed cuts to library funding, staff and programs threatened by newly elected members of the library board.

“The staff at the Niles-Maine District Library has spent decades working with different board leadership to

understand the functions of a public library and have no interest in learning them,” teen services librarian Rachel Colias said.

“Once we realized we weren’t being offered a seat at the table, we pulled up our own with AFSCME. The people who work here have invested too much in this library to be so easily dismissed, and we hope to work as a union to protect our ability to serve anyone who relies on us.”

A broad group of supporters led by Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky and including state and local elected officials and spiritual and community leaders signed an open letter to the board, supporting the employees and opposing cuts to library

services and staff.

“We are proud that the Niles-Maine District Library provides valuable services to our community, and we are dedicated to ensuring that those vital services continue,” the leaders’ letter begins. “Unfortunately, the newly

elected Library Board’s recent actions appear to place those services in jeopardy.”

## Democracy in action

“The library is all about our community, and this board wants to cut the programs that help us serve you all,” AFSCME member and librarian Donna Block said at the rally. “They want to cut services like children’s librarians visiting schools and recommending materials for our students; they want to cut our teen AV collection; they want to cut the hours of our teen space; and they want to cut outreach deliveries to nursing homes and homebound patrons. Does that sound OK to you?”

The crowd of students, families and senior citizens responded with a resounding “No!”

The next day the budget amendment that should preserve staff, hours and service was unanimously approved. The library employees had

won. Now they will work to build a strong union with a fair contract.

“My co-workers and I have invaluable insight into what we need to do our work effectively. Our organizational knowledge is deep; we know this place and we’ve made our careers here,” youth services librarian Cate Levinson said. “This community loves the library, and they know the people who work here love it too. I believe the library and the community it serves will benefit from the work we will do together as members of AFSCME.”

*AFSCME represents more than 3,000 library workers in communities throughout Illinois, more than any other union. Nationwide, AFSCME represents more than 25,000 library workers and thousands of workers at universities and other cultural institutions. Together they make up Cultural Workers United. Learn more at [CulturalWorkersUnited.org](http://CulturalWorkersUnited.org).*



## Art Institute of Chicago workers joining AFSCME

Employees of the Art Institute of Chicago and the School of the Art Institute are coming together to form a union with AFSCME Council 31.

The new group, the Art Institute of Chicago Workers United (AICWU), announced their campaign in open letters signed by more than 100 employees.

“We are happy to welcome Art Institute of Chicago

employees to our ever-growing AFSCME family,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “The museum is a Chicago icon, part of the heart of our city, and the employees are the heart of the museum

and the school. By coming together in their union, these workers can make both the museum and the school of the Art Institute a better place to work, visit and learn for all of Chicago.”

“We believe there can be no equity without power sharing; therefore, we are uniting to form our union,” the museum employees’ letter reads.

“We are organizing a union

*Continued on next page.*



# “AFSCME helped me get what I always wanted”

*Union members, families eligible for free college degree programs*

**A** FSCME Local 501 member Courtney Edwards has always wanted her college degree. A correctional sergeant at Lincoln Correctional Center, Edwards started working for the Department of Corrections in 2010. She wanted to go to college then but put it off when she had her son. Now a mother of two, she felt that going back to get her degree was financially impossible.

“I was looking for online degrees that I could complete at my own pace, and they ran from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a semester. I thought, how do I support my kids, pay for my house and day care, still work and go to school?”

Then Edwards heard about the AFSCME Free College program in which AFSCME members and their families can earn an associate’s degree from Eastern Gateway Community College and a bachelor’s degree from Central State University in Ohio. Both programs are completely free, online, and offer a wide array of focus areas including criminal justice, business administration, early childhood education and more.

“I thought I might as well look into it. I set aside a day to go online and fill everything out, which was really easy. And a week later they called me to set up my classes. It was very convenient and simple,” she said.

“This benefit gave me the opportunity to not worry about finances for once in my life. You actually get to focus on the school. I have a 3.7 grade point average through my associate degree and that’s carrying on over to the new school with all my credits.”

## Education that works

Edwards is finishing up her associate degree at Eastern Gateway Community College and starting her bachelor’s program at CSU in August. She’s focusing on criminal justice.

After years of working on the front lines in corrections, she feels the classes are teaching her valuable lessons about big picture policy—especially as DOC is working toward transforming the state’s corrections system.

“Knowledge is power and now I understand so much more,” Edwards said.

## Spreading the word

Edwards loves telling her fellow union members about this benefit. So far she’s encouraged many co-workers and five of them are already taking classes. Her local union offers help filling out the forms and signing up for the program.

“Our union will provide a free education to you or your family members. That’s a huge benefit that many of us don’t realize we have,” Edwards said. “So many people are in debt for their degree and mine is all paid for. If I could do it, you can do it.”

Nationwide, more than 20,000 AFSCME members and their families have taken advantage of the free college benefit, which is open to union members, retirees and family members of union members, including children, spouses, siblings and others. Visit [freecollege.afscme.org](http://freecollege.afscme.org) or call (888) 590-9009 for more information.

“AFSCME helped me get what I always wanted, and it’s changed my whole entire world,” Edwards said. That’s why she’s helping others get their degrees. “You build so much confidence and you believe in yourself again. When I get a test back, a quiz back, see my grades—nobody did that but me.”



Courtney Edwards is getting her college degree—for free—with AFSCME.

“Our union will provide a free education to you or your family members. That’s a huge benefit.”



Employees at the Art Institute of Chicago and the School of the Art Institute are joining forces for a voice on the job.

## Art Institute of Chicago

*Continued from previous page.*

because we love the Art Institute, and we believe that what’s good for the workers is good for the museum,” technician Thomas

Huston said. “We want to secure a better future for the workers who make the museum what it is.”

“I wanted to join with my co-workers in organizing because I feel like a union is our

best chance at affecting real and lasting material change within this institution,” said school mailroom technician Katie Bourgeois. “AICWU is a pledge to my coworkers, my friends, and my community that we will continue to fight for each other.”

The organizing committee is now collecting union cards signed by their co-workers and will ask the museum to voluntarily recognize their union when a strong majority have signed.

The workers know they deserve a voice on the job and they’re willing to stand up for

that right. They need better wages and benefits, transparent and fair advancement opportunities, and safe and reasonable working conditions. That’s why the workers decided to form a union, but unfortunately, their employer has already turned up the anti-union heat.

“Employees should be free to exercise their right to form their union without employer interference,” Lynch said. “The museum should not squander its resources—money or time—on anti-union attorneys, anti-union emails or anti-union meetings with workers.”

Across the country AFSCME already represents some 10,000 museum workers at 91 cultural institutions and more than 25,000 library workers at 275 public and private libraries, including the Chicago Public Library and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.



# SPRING FORWARD TOGETHER

Council 31  
**AFSCME**

## REUNITED... AND IT FEELS SO GOOD

This spring and summer, AFSCME local unions across the state sponsored special Spring Forward Together events—social gatherings to help members reconnect with each other and strengthen the essential bonds of solidarity.

**Dennis Young, Local 1175 President, Menard Correctional Center**

“We wanted everybody to come out and enjoy some food on us to take a break and show our unity. Menard is one of the most stressful places to work in the state. And for that reason, Menard has always been a big, close-knit family. We know we don’t have a choice, brothers and sisters have to look out for each other. We’ve been through so much together, good memories and bad memories. Even with the pandemic, we stuck together, and we have proven that Menard can make it through anything. We always look out for each other no matter what the obstacle.”

**Michelle Ch...**  
Treasurer,

“We had planned for December 20th, but a storm and the lightning up, appreciation of atmosphere. We had drinks and a social local charity. Menard in the Pumpkin Patch with Feed My Soul building event”

**Daphnee Powell, Local 3436 President, Department of Corrections and Juvenile Justice – Chicago**

“It was so awesome. We all voted on a bowling event and within four days we sold out. We kept it smaller because of social distancing. We had a three-hour buffet with shoes and bowling included. And we raffled off some items that people donated. We had a doggone good time. Before this event, we did a three-day officer appreciation event for folks to hang out, eat some food and have a good time. And later this summer we’re doing a picnic. We’re going to have games and give away backpacks filled with school supplies. Everyone is excited. We haven’t done anything like this for a very, very long time. It’s well overdue.”

**Amy Boden**  
Southern Illinois

“We were missing on separate connections just increased together and Together program. We had a of AFSCME general showed up to Every family was It was great to families, getting It was lovely to and get those other face to face important. It’s





**Christianson, Local 3537  
DeKalb County**

...ed a member Christmas party for  
19 that was canceled due to a winter  
n COVID hit. When COVID seemed to be  
our e-board wanted to show members  
and have some summer fun in a relaxed  
We had a party with appetizers and  
small raffle with proceeds to benefit a  
Moving forward, we have plans to walk  
n Fest Parade in October and volunteer  
Starving Children in November. We are  
planning other volunteer and team-  
ts for members in the coming months.”

**Kim Turner, Local 981,  
Eastern Illinois University**

“It’s been a difficult year with the pandemic and  
with our contract negotiations. We wanted to do  
something social and show solidarity outside the  
workplace. We had a breakfast in the park with  
prizes. It was really nice because we could connect  
with each other’s families and just relax. We haven’t  
done anything like that in a really long time. Our  
members are stressed. It was refreshing to put all that  
aside for a moment. Getting together like this lets us  
know we’re here for each other and we’re all getting  
through this together.”

**Lilliana Craft, Local 3969,  
Cook County**

“It was nice to get out, but it’s a little bittersweet.  
I caught COVID during the pandemic and was  
hospitalized for nine days. You want to get together  
with people and explore but you also want to do it  
cautiously. The fact that it was an outdoor event, a  
Sox game, was a great thing. I am fully vaccinated  
now. I got the shot because I don’t want to find out  
what would happen if I got COVID again. Also, I  
know people in my home and around me who have  
medical conditions who I would put at risk. If I could  
prevent, in even the slightest degree, bringing it to  
someone else, I’m willing to do it. It was great to be  
out, amongst members and seeing the camaraderie,  
seeing everyone enjoying being together.”

**Jeremy Givens, Local 3600 President,  
Lawrence Correctional Center**

“The forefront of unions are people. That’s what  
we’re about. It’s been extremely hard over the  
pandemic, not being able to socialize with people  
and come together as a whole. Our Spring Forward  
Together event got us back together and got us back  
to our roots. Now I’m a little worried we are going to  
relive last year. We do everything we can to mitigate  
the virus but it’s so efficient at spreading. Being  
together gets you amped up, excited, rejuvenated  
and recharged. It’s hard to hold on to that  
rejuvenation when we don’t know what life will look  
like in six months, but it helps being around everyone.  
We’re more solid together.”

**Stab, Local 2887 Vice President,  
Illinois University – Edwardsville**

...sing that in-person interaction. Working  
campuses, we’re constantly trying to  
our membership, and being at home  
that concern. We were ecstatic to get  
be part of the larger Spring Forward  
gram because it’s not just us feeling this  
a potluck with music. We did giveaways  
ar because we wanted everyone who  
have a physical reminder of the event.  
who came got something to take home.  
o see not just our members but their  
ng to know them, getting to interact.  
o have everyone in the same place  
positive vibes going. It was so nice to  
get a big hug after we hadn’t seen each  
face in over a year. Connecting is super  
a catalyst for trust.”





# “What AFSCME has meant to our family”

One of the 12 winners of the national 2021 AFSCME Family Scholarship is Miley Worker, a student from Vandalia Community High School and the daughter of AFSCME Council 31 Executive Board member and Local 993 President Tim Worker. The following is an excerpt from her application essay.

Growing up in the small rural town of Vandalia, Illinois, my siblings and I have always been blessed and happy. Vandalia is a low-income community, with not many career opportunities. However, our mom and dad both work full-time jobs. Our mom works out of town in a private school and our dad works at the Illinois Department of Corrections in Vandalia.

My dad’s long and prosperous career as a correctional officer and correctional lieutenant is how our family has managed financial stability in our small town of great people with limited career opportunities. My dad’s career is how my family became affiliated with AFSCME, and AFSCME has been a strong contributing factor to our happiness and success.

My dad’s job at the Vandalia IDOC is not an easy one. It requires him to work weekends and holidays, second and third shifts, and many overtime shifts. In addition, his working environment comes with risks

The protection and stability AFSCME has provided are priceless.

of injury and lots of stress. These challenges have affected our family in many ways, such as: dad missing Thanksgiving and Christmas, dad missing volleyball and football games,



Winner of the AFSCME Family scholarship, Miley Worker shares how the union helped shape her future.

dad having to miss a family cookout because he’s working a double, the stress of dad getting involved in an altercation with an inmate, dad being tired, dad being stressed about a scary incident at work, dad being exposed to viruses, such as the flu and COVID-19.


There have been many

challenges we have had to accept as a family, due to my dad’s career. That’s where AFSCME has played a big role for our family. Although my dad’s career is high risk and demands 24/7 shiftwork, our family has the comfort of knowing that AFSCME protects him. They protect his rights

as an essential worker. They protect his rights to fair wages. They protect his rights to affordable medical care. They protect his contractual rights. They protect his accessibility to training. They protect his future. In turn, they protect our family.

The protection and stability AFSCME has provided to my dad’s career are priceless. Small, rural communities in Illinois are at a disadvantage to bigger cities when it comes to career opportunities that allow working class people a chance to provide for their families. Through fair wages, medical care, and job security, AFSCME [creates] these types of careers in rural communities.

AFSCME’s principles of giving back to communities and social and economic equality have extended into our family’s principles. My parents have influenced me and my siblings to be aware of those in need and to use our voices to help others. That’s why I hope to pursue my career in the medical field.

I plan to continue volunteering in my community and hope to pass that torch to my future children. I, like my dad, am AFSCME strong. I’m very proud. 

## Illinois budget: Outlook good!

Illinois’ credit ratings are up for the first time in more than 20 years, signaling better days ahead for our state. In fact, all three ratings agencies have upgraded the state’s outlook from negative to positive.

Earlier this year Governor JB Pritzker put forth a plan to balance the state’s FY 22 budget by closing some of the state’s array of corporate tax loopholes that have been criticized for years but seldom seriously challenged.

The governor’s plan, which was adopted with only limited modifications by the General Assembly, did not include any state employee furloughs, layoffs, wage givebacks, or facility closures.

Instead, it makes the entire

requisite pension contribution and pays down the state debt.

In essence, it continues the process of repairing the damage that Bruce Rauner did to the state’s fiscal stability. Rauner ran up billions of dollars in debt while starving state agencies for funding, reducing staffing levels in many key agencies.


The bond agencies reacted very favorably to the new budget, raising the state’s credit rating and forecasting better days ahead for Illinois.



Bond agencies forecasting better days ahead for Illinois.

“The state is prudently applying the gains to fully retire federal deficit borrowing undertaken just a few months

ago, repay outstanding inter-fund loans used as budget balancers in prior years and drive down the bills backlog,”

stated the Fitch Ratings analysis. “Recent fiscal results and the enacted fiscal 2022 budget suggest further improvements in operating performance and structural balance in the near and medium-term that could support a return to the pre-pandemic rating or higher. 



# AFSCME members keep children safe through pandemic

*Three DCFS investigators share their stories*

**C**hild Protection Specialists in the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services have been on the job throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting the well-being of vulnerable children despite the risks to their own health and safety. While standing up for their own rights on the job, these AFSCME members have never stopped standing up for the children and families who need their help.



## Apple Glover

LOCAL 805, SPRINGFIELD

Apple Glover came to DCFS from a private agency two years ago. After only a few months on the job, COVID-19 hit the state. But even on the hard days, she loves her new job. And she's dedicated to children at work and at home. The mother of four and grandmother of 12 is also a foster mom to twin six-month-old baby girls. After late nights of feeding two infants, she heads to work to ensure the safety of children in the Springfield region.

"I love what I do," Glover said. "I'm not going to say that it's easy. There are days that I'm running on low vapors. And there are days when you've seen something or heard something terrible, or you have that one case that lingers in the back of your mind. You get in your car and you're driving and all of a sudden the tears are rolling down your face. But that doesn't deter me. I love being able to help ensure that children are safe."

Glover said that while the pandemic obviously posed big challenges and risks to workers' health, not a lot changed with the job. The reports of abuse and neglect never stopped, so neither did DCFS employees.

Glover said she and her co-workers depend on one

another for support. "You have to have a passion for what you do in our line of work, and we definitely do. I'm blessed to be part of this team."

## Tiara Long

LOCAL 2081, CHICAGO

Tiara Long has been a child protection specialist for the state of Illinois for eight years.

"We respond to hotline calls that come in with an allegation of substantial risk to children by abuse or by neglect, including inadequate shelter, inadequate supervision, sexual abuse, violence or neglect," Long said. "We gather more information, then go knock on the door. We introduce ourselves, ask to see the children and speak



Tiara Long

with them about what was reported. Sometimes we're knocking on the doors not knowing what's on the other side, hoping that the family will be receptive."

The job is protecting children but it's also about helping the families. "A lot of the families face many barriers and lack the services—especially mental health services—they need to do a better job of protecting their children so they can stay together."

Long said that COVID hit her department hard. "COVID



AFSCME members like Kertrina Dickerson at Local 51 in Peoria have been working to keep children and families safe despite the obstacles posed by the ongoing pandemic.

did not stop abuse, it did not stop the hotline calls. Some of us were placed in the position of going into homes and hospitals even if the children were exposed to COVID. A lot of my colleagues caught COVID. We knew we might bring this back to our own homes, our elderly parents, our children, but we were still doing the work."

She and her co-workers refused to give up, no matter the challenges, and they had the bonds of solidarity to make it through. "In a very difficult situation, something we'd never seen before, my colleagues and I got the job done and done well. We relied on each other and our union. AFSCME fought so hard for us. When CMS stated Child Protection would be excluded from the federal CARES Act, AFSCME fought hard and got us what was fair and right. I'm very grateful."

## Kertrina Dickerson

LOCAL 51, PEORIA


The ultimate goal of a child protection specialist "is to be able to go home with enough reassurance that the families I encountered are left a little stronger and the kids are all safe," Kertrina Dickerson said.

After the first couple months when COVID hit, hotline calls spiked. The pressures of the pandemic could be seen in the nature and volume of need. "We got so busy. There was an escalation of domestic violence with more calls coming from the police and hospitals. Mothers who normally can get that break when they send their kids to school, had a lot more demands on them. Our job expectations didn't change but the barriers got bigger."

COVID made the job

harder in other ways, too, like having to wear a mask. "You need to use all five of your senses as an investigator," Dickerson said. "With the mask you lose your sense of smell. You can't see facial expressions. Or it's harder to tell if someone has been drinking."

Dickerson spent 23 years working for a private agency before she came to DCFS. Today she's happy to work for the state as an AFSCME member, with rights on the job and a secure retirement—still doing the work she loves.

"Child protection is my calling," Dickerson said. "It's the hardest job I've ever done in my life, but I absolutely love it. A lot of times parents don't know what they don't know, so they repeat cycles of how things were done when they were young. I like helping them understand that there's a better way." 



# ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Members of AFSCME Local 988 were joined by fellow AFSCME members in the region in protesting the sale of the public water service in Rock Island.

## AFSCME members protest sale of R.I. water service

AHEAD OF A PRESENTATION at the July 26 Rock Island City Council meeting by the private corporation pushing to take over the city's water service, AFSCME Local 988 members sounded the alarm about the

**"I don't think something like water should be used for profit."**

privatization scheme with a robust informational picket, supported at the action by fellow AFSCME members from Locals 1132, 1234, 672, 2025 and 2615.

For months, public works employees have been fighting the sale of the public water service to American Water, a billion-dollar multinational corporation that makes its profits by buying up public water systems.

AFSCME is fighting the sale because such schemes take public services out of public hands, making them less transparent and less accountable to the community. And corporate owners often drive up costs to residents

while cutting corners on quality in pursuit of private profit.

In fact, a recent report found toxic chemicals in drinking water provided by American Water in Davenport, Iowa, where the company just raised the rates it charges to local residents there for the second time in four years.

"I don't think something like water should be used for profit," AFSCME Local 988 member Graeme Jewell told reporters.

Local 988 recently won a new five-year agreement with the city with 8% raises and contract language improvements. The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt and included President Nick Hartman, Russell Thomas, Matt Sonnevile, Mike Lyle, Mark Maloney, Tony Munson, Rick Hitchcock, Will Conger and Kevin Whitehair, Jr.

## Nursing home employees raise the floor

AFSCME LOCAL 2452 MEMBERS at Thrive nursing home in Lake County made real gains in wages and important workplace protections in their new three-year agreement.

Depending on the employee's position, starting wages

increased to between \$15 and \$33 an hour. Current employees will be either placed at the new starting rate or receive a percentage increase, whichever is greater.

Local President Nicole Thomas said she's hopeful these higher wage rates will help the nursing home attract and retain employees.

"Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour was really great. Some people in their first year will get a three-dollar raise, that's a significant jump," Thomas said.

The bargaining team also secured one week of paid maternity leave, which the employer had never provided before. They won a \$200 bonus after a new employee's probationary period is up and a \$200 bonus for employees who don't call off work for a period of time. They also added two

holidays to the contract, New Year's Eve and Christmas Eve.

"We had a lot of nice changes like that," said Thomas, who was joined on the bargaining team by Maribel Novelo, Maricela Mendoza, Matt Meillor and Stefanie Stines, with Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis leading the negotiations. But for Thomas and her co-workers, the most important victory was addressing the chronic problem of short-staffing, which undermines safety and patient care.

"We were short-staffed, as a lot of nursing homes have been," she said, "but with COVID it had metastasized. Now we have a policy in place to hold management accountable for adequately and safely covering shifts. If we feel the level of staffing isn't adequate for us to do our duties, we can file a grievance."

Employees were being denied time-off requests and being forced to work holidays. So the committee secured changes to the contract to help ensure people get their much-needed time off.

After the initial shock and confusion of the pandemic in 2020, Thomas said Thrive management has been doing well stopping the spread of COVID in the nursing home.

"And since receiving the

**"Now we have a policy in place to hold management accountable."**



AFSCME Local 2452 bargaining team members Nicole Thomas, Maribel Novelo and Maricela Mendoza.



vaccine this March we haven't had any residents test positive," Thomas said. "Only one employee has tested positive and that was controlled right away. I feel safe at work. We have everything that we need, and we are keeping the residents and employees safe. We haven't had any positive cases with the Delta variant and I'm praying it doesn't come."

## 100% union local gains ground in Milan

SMALL BUT MIGHTY, AFSCME Local 1132 represents 15 employees at the Village of Milan and they are all full union members. Together they won a good new contract with the village.

Union steward Ryan Dunbar said Local 1132 knows that solidarity is key. "We're city workers at a small village. Everyone is a union member because we know it needs to be all for one and one for all. You have a variety of people who are coming together to do what's best for everyone, to find what's good for the whole."

The agreement includes 6% in raises over three years and compresses the pay scale so that employees with more years of service are able to see their longevity rewarded with higher pay earlier in their career.

"The pay scale originally topped out at 30 years and we got it pushed down to 20 years so members who have been there two decades got a substantial raise," Dunbar said. "I've only been there eight years so I'm not affected yet, but I know that money is going to be there waiting for me."

The local also moved the city clerks to the pay scale of 911 dispatchers, who were moved out of the unit, and they will see their salaries go up. "Their job has changed over the years and the clerks' duties have increased," Dunbar said, "so it's nice to see that their pay scale can reflect that."

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt, along with Dunbar, Nate McKay and Hayley Myers.

Dunbar said his local stays united by keeping everyone informed with transparent and thorough information. "We stuck together to see that everybody gets their fair shake."



Local 1132 bargaining committee members Ryan Dunbar, Nate McKay and Hayley Myers represented their fellow union members at the Village of Milan.

## Educators in prisons see big wage hike

LAKE LAND COLLEGE, BASED in Mattoon, provides vocational community college services to offenders in more than a dozen Illinois correctional facilities. AFSCME members employed by Lake Land are members of local unions at those facilities. Together they recently won significant and

much-needed wage increases.

Instructors and clerical staff at Lake Land help provide a wide range of vocational education to offenders housed in DOC facilities, including horticulture, commercial cooking, welding, career technology and construction trades.

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Patricia Rensing, negotiations focused on the need for Lake Land to attract and retain instructors and administrative support for the programs. That approach is critical

to DOC's stated goal of curbing recidivism and providing enriching programs that help offenders secure a job and build a stable life once they are released.

"Our AFSCME team recognized the relationship between DOC and Lake Land," Rensing said. "That's why we pushed for economic gains for employees that would enable both groups to achieve their goals. And we were successful."

Instructors will receive 5% raises in each year of the three-year agreement and clerical

employees 6% annual raises. Not only did the team win 15% and 18% wage increases, but they also raised the minimum salary for every position and ensured that current employees were boosted to those same higher levels.

The team also secured two bereavement days and maintained current employee contributions for health insurance.

"These raises were truly a recognition of the work these educators do because they weren't offset by insurance increases," Rensing said.

The bargaining committee included broad representation from the correctional facilities that contract with Lake Land: Marissa Montgomery, Local 415, Vienna; Harry Bell, Local 472, Sheridan; James Lercher, Local 501, Lincoln; Brijitte Hartsfield, Local 817, Dixon; Brian Bender, Local 943, Pinckneyville; Todd Mason, Local 1274, Hill; Lamour Gile, Local 2856, Graham; William Crone, Local 3549, Jacksonville; Ryan Klauser, Local 3567, Western; Chad Way, Local 3585, Canton/IL River; Marcie Burton, Local 3600, Lawrence; Amy Coonce, Local 3649, Robinson; Brent Urfer, Local 3653, Taylorville; Michael Tuck, Local 3654, Southwestern; William Nolen, Local 3663, Big Muddy. 🐾

## AFSCME HELPS CHANGE THE LAW FOR WEXFORD CNAS

In the spring state legislative session, the AFSCME Council 31 lobbying team secured passage of a bill that helps certified nursing assistants (CNAs) in the Illinois Department of Corrections maintain their certification.

Sponsored by Sen. Christopher Belt, Rep. Jaime Andrade and Rep. LaToya Greenwood, the legislation amends the Health Care Worker Background Check Act. Under that law, CNAs must be continuously employed (no more than a 24-month break in service) by a health care employer or else they are listed as inactive on the Health Care Worker Registry and so prohibited from being hired to work as a CNA.

The definition of "health care employer" under the law didn't include the Department of Corrections or a third-party vendor employing certified nursing assistants working with the Department of Corrections, such as Wexford Health Services, which employs many AFSCME members. As a result, CNAs working in Illinois correctional facilities were forced to seek secondary employment in order to maintain their certifications.

"The law didn't make sense," said Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. "It just left out CNAs who've been actively working in the state's prisons."

The problem originally came to light at Graham Correctional Center. "The union steward and president there reached out to their staff representative, and we all thought, if the law isn't working, let's change it," Webb-Gauvin said. And they did. The bill was signed into law by Gov. JB Pritzker on July 30. "We're very happy. The new law is a big win and a big help for CNAs working in DOC facilities."



# SHORT REPORTS



"Nobody and nothing can defeat or deny a united labor movement!"—AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

## Mourning the loss of a great labor leader

AFL-CIO PRESIDENT RICHARD Trumka passed away on August 5 while spending time with his grandsons. The 56 unions and 12.5 million members of the AFL-CIO—including AFSCME—joined in mourning the loss of a great leader.

Born July 24, 1949, Trumka lived a life dedicated to workers' rights. He was elected president of the AFL-CIO on September 16, 2009, having served as the secretary-treasurer from 1995 to 2009. His roots are in the coal fields where he worked as a miner. He was president of the United Mine Workers from 1982 to 1995.

"Rich Trumka stood up for workers' rights from his beginnings as a miner in the Pennsylvania coal fields through all his years as leader of the AFL-CIO," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "We are grateful for his tireless determination to strengthen democracy and build a strong middle class in this country. We will honor his memory by carrying on the work of his life."

"We've lost one of the nation's fiercest, most effective advocates for working people ever," AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. "From workplace safety to racial justice to retirement security to labor law reform and so much more, Rich has never relented in the struggle to ensure that working people are able to have lives of dignity and security."

"He wasn't just a great labor leader, he was a friend," President Joe Biden said. "He

was someone I could confide in. You knew whatever he said he'd do, he would do."

The AFL-CIO issued a statement saying the organization commits "to honoring his legacy with action. Standing on Rich's shoulders, we will pour everything we have into building an economy, society and democracy that lifts up every working family and community."

Less than a month before he died, Trumka addressed the virtual constitutional convention of the Texas AFL-CIO on July 27.

"Without the right to vote and without the right to organize, there is no democracy. The

survival of democracy anywhere depends on working people to defend it everywhere. Nobody and nothing can defeat or deny a united labor movement!"

## Child tax credits arrive

AFSCME MEMBERS ALL across Illinois got a big economic boost this summer when the latest benefit of President Biden's American Rescue Plan began arriving in Illinois as the IRS began distributing the proceeds of expanded child tax credits to families nationwide.

"We will honor his memory by carrying on the work of his life."

The largest-ever tax cut for working families in American history, the expanded child tax credit recognizes that families need support to recover from the devastating impact of the pandemic—and that raising kids is costly at any time.

Paid first on July 15 and in equal installments every month through the end of the year, the tax credit is automatic—the first of its kind—so that families receive the funds without having to apply.


## Remote work continues in some state agencies

AS THE STATE OF ILLINOIS lays plans to reopen all its operations, AFSCME is on the job to make sure that workplaces are safe from COVID—ensuring that masks are worn where needed, that work stations are socially distanced and/or separated by partitions, and that testing is performed as needed.

Given that a large portion of the Illinois state government workforce has been working remotely for a year or more now—and getting the job done just as well as before—AFSCME has urged that the state consider continuing to have that work performed remotely. The Pritzker Administration agreed that there could be value in such an approach and worked with the union to develop a plan to move forward.

AFSCME reached an agreement with Central Management Services (CMS) to provide a framework that would allow for the establishment of remote work pilot programs that would be operational through January 31, 2022, on an agency basis.

Union representatives are meeting with state agencies to determine the feasibility of such a remote work pilot program and to ensure that any such program is fairly implemented.

The agreement is intended to provide a framework for agency-specific negotiations with union standing committees or specially-convened committees as needed. The agreement will also trigger agency initiatives to begin a "return to work" process in some agencies. In addition to any negotiations over remote work, the union has the right to demand to bargain over the terms and conditions of that return—particularly over health and safety concerns that employees may have. 

## AFSCME COUNCIL 31 BIENNIAL CONVENTION

AFSCME local unions across Illinois have begun preparations for Council 31's 22nd Biennial Convention, scheduled for October 14-16 in Springfield.

The Council 31 Executive Board has unanimously agreed that the union should take all measures possible to allow for a safe, in-person convention during the current public health crisis. The schedule and the logistics will be a little different than years past—including limits on guests—but the energy will still be as high and the spirits even higher.

Delegates from across the state elected by members of their local unions, will vote on resolutions that will set policy and guide strategy for the coming two years. They'll also hear from guest speakers, like International AFSCME President Lee Saunders and U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh.

As at past conventions, this gathering will honor members who show outstanding dedication to their work and their union.

The **Public Service Award** is for individuals who exemplify the very best in public service, going the extra mile day in and day out to give public service workers a good name. The **Jane Fitzgerald Award** is for the local union activist who demonstrates dedication, spirit, farsightedness, and energy in working to build a strong local union.

**Any AFSCME member can nominate a fellow member for either of the biennial awards. Visit [AFSCME31.org/Award](https://AFSCME31.org/Award) to submit a nomination.**

Follow @AFSCME31 on twitter and Facebook.com/AFSCME31 for coverage of the biennial convention



# RETIREE NOTES

## 41st Annual Retiree Council Meeting

THE NATIONAL AFSCME Retiree Council met virtually in June for its Annual Meeting. It opened with a moment of silence for the large number of AFSCME retiree members who were lost to COVID.

The meeting included a lobby day where delegates from across the country met over Zoom with members of Congress to request their support of the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82/S. 1302), which would fully repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

Alma Wingard, a former employee of the Chicago Public Library and treasurer of Illinois Retiree Chapter 31, is directly affected by both WEP and GPO.

"The WEP and GPO offsets lower your earned Social Security benefits," she said. "I am a widow, and don't get the Social Security that I should have received when my husband passed away because I have a pension. It should not be like this."

AFSCME President Lee Saunders said it is "nothing short of outrageous" that retired public service workers and others are "cheated out of benefits they deserve simply because they have a pension."

Delegates from Chapter 31, including Wingard, met with Rep. Bobby Rush and Rep. Rodney Davis who both support the Social Security Fairness Act.

Rep. Rush also supports the AFSCME-backed Lower Drug Prices Now Act (H.R. 3). Delegates also urged members of Congress to pass this legislation, which is a good first step toward stopping soaring prescription drug prices that pad the profit margins of the big drug companies.

The tireless activism of AFSCME retirees has repeatedly defeated legislation attacking retirement security and helped push through legislation to help the average American worker and retiree. Retirees should continue to call their members of Congress to ask them to support these pieces of legislation.

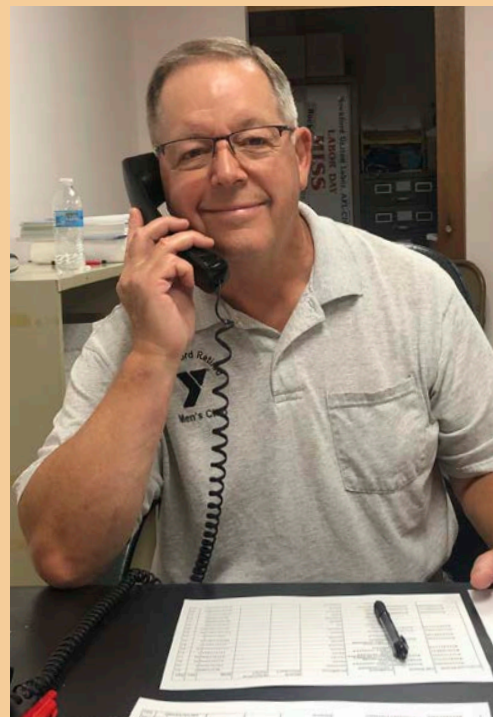
## AFSCME RETIREES SERVING THE COMMUNITY



Sub-Chapter 87 members joined a ribbon-cutting and meet-and-greet with Senator Doris Turner at her Decatur office.



Sub-chapter 73 member Herbert Hughey registering voters at a job fair at Cornerstone Services in Joliet.



Sub-Chapter 69 member Greg Johnson volunteers to call residents of Stephenson County, asking them to call their county board member and urge they vote no on the sale of the Walnut Acres nursing home.

## "Caregivers need help"

"IF I COULD CHANGE ANYTHING about our social system, it would be to provide an advocate to help caregivers," said Roger Kennedy, a member of Springfield Sub-chapter 86. "Caregivers need help."

Kennedy is the primary caregiver for his wife, who is currently battling recurrent stage 4 ovarian cancer. "While we have been fortunate to have my state insurance, the stress and difficulty accessing care and resources is immense," he said.

Like Kennedy, the majority of caregivers in the U.S. are

unpaid family members. Existing caregiving programs and services can be expensive and are difficult to navigate, with hundreds of thousands left on waiting lists. Given these dire concerns, members of AFSCME and the Alliance for Retired Americans have been meeting with members of Congress to share their stories and request support for more funding in this critical area.

Caregivers—both paid and unpaid—have been underpaid and undervalued for far too long. Average wages for direct-care workers are approximately \$12 per hour, putting them among the lowest-paid workers in our economy. In fact, one in

six workers in this sector lives in poverty.

The good news is that Congress passed the American Rescue Plan with more than \$12.6 billion designated for home and community-based services. Chapter 31 retirees are engaging in conversations in Illinois on how to best spend that money to provide caregivers the help they need.

"This movement is growing, and we are advancing the call for care, but we need your support now," said Louis Goseland of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans. "If you have a care story, or would like to get involved, reach out me at [lgoeland@illinoisretiredamericans.org](mailto:lgoeland@illinoisretiredamericans.org)."

## Pension trustee reports

### State Employees Retirement System

"THE ILLINOIS STATE BOARD of Investment (ISBI) performed well during the pandemic and ISBI is now in the top 10% when ranked among peers," reports newly re-elected SERS Annuitant Trustee John Tilden. "The return for the quarter ending December 31, 2021 was 8.8%, exceeding the benchmark by 30 basis points."

"We are also happy to report that the estimated current bill backlog for the State has decreased from \$7.3 billion two years ago to approximately \$3.7 billion. This means that providers and contractors are more willing to work with the state."

This positive viewpoint was confirmed when credit agencies upgraded the outlook of Illinois' general obligation bonds from negative to stable, noting that this is the result of the shared fiscal discipline that has been practiced over the last few years.

### Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund

"I AM PLEASED TO REPORT IMRF's investment returns have been solid, exceeding our assumptions," stated newly elected IMRF Annuitant Trustee Louis Kosiba. When he joined the Board on January 1, IMRF held assets of \$50.3 billion, and as of June 30th, assets are approximately \$54.6 billion. By one measure (market basis), IMRF is 100% funded, which is unique nationally and particularly in Illinois.

"From my perspective, this is important for two reasons. First, it provides you with peace of mind. At IMRF, the liabilities (costs to cover benefits promised to retirees) are 100% funded. Second, a solid investment return reduces costs to IMRF employers. This helps local government by freeing up tax dollars to invest in its employees and programs," Kosiba said.

"The IMRF Board has also been diligently working with our investment consultants and internal investment staff to ensure that returns perform the heavy work necessary to protect your financial security." 





Unfortunately, I also see a lot of negative in my job. Every case you get, this person committed a crime. And you have 'frequent flyers' who reoffend.

But what keeps me going is that I have good co-workers. When you see so much negative stuff, working with good people helps a lot. I've made some really good friends working here the last 23 years. We all came up together and now we all work in the probation department together.

We're pretty close to 100% union at our local. And for the last several years we've had really good leaders. Our president, Cathi Gitchoff, passed away. She is missed.

### **What's your inspiration to go to work every day?**

I've been doing this work for 24 years. Seeing people that I helped in the past and having them say, 'Hey, you were my PO, thanks for everything you did.' That makes you feel good, knowing that you did help somebody.


The majority of my caseload have underlying mental health, drug and alcohol issues that were never dealt with. Those need to be dealt with in order to get better. And once they do—when they realize where they messed up and start fixing the mistakes they made—it improves their lives. And it's not just the person on probation. In turn, their work helps their girlfriend, their wife, their husband, their kids. It improves all their lives. That's inspiring to me.

### **What have you learned from your work as a probation officer?**

The people I talk to have had the deck stacked against them. And in fact, generation after generation of the deck stacked against them. I don't see the stuff they did firsthand; I see it after the police and courts have done their thing. I read it in reports. But it's by interviewing the person that I figure out what kind of person they really are and how I can help them.

This work makes you grateful for what you have. I can go home and talk and laugh with my wife and kids. I had good parents that raised me right. My wife's a teacher. She talks about her issues in her class, and I talk about issues at my work. When the kids ask, 'How was your day, dad?' I talk to them about it and explain that people make mistakes. I think our kids have learned right from wrong and to want to help people.

### **How does your union improve your workplace?**

The union fights for the rights of the workers. The union fought for my family insurance, fought for our wages, our ability to take vacation and spend time with our families. That's all because of the union. 

# Bill Van Buskirk

## AFSCME Local 799

### MADISON COUNTY PROBATION OFFICER

### **Tell us about your job as a probation officer.**

I have a domestic violence caseload of about 80 cases. I monitor their progress through domestic violence classes and try to help get them back on track with their lives. Often, they don't know where to begin, they don't know what to do. So, you help them get an ID, for instance, or look for a job. Throughout the interviews, if you find out they have drug or alcohol issues, you get them into substance abuse treatment.

We also get the high-risk cases of all the adult offenders—they might get a case for simple battery, yet they have a history of drug abuse, which puts them at high risk for reoffending. And we monitor the juveniles who are on house arrest after being released from detention.

### **How does your job provide a valuable public service?**

We monitor the behavior of people on probation. If you help some of these people find jobs, make their own money, get them off drugs, you can help them stop what they were doing before and prevent them from reoffending. And if you can get people to seek drug treatment and stop doing drugs, for example, you're saving their life.

When it comes to domestic violence cases, if

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**“Seeing people that I helped in the past and having them say, ‘Hey, you were my PO, thanks for everything you did.’ That makes you feel good.”**

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they get DV treatment and figure out how to deal with their emotions, then they don't beat on their wives or girlfriends. Without help, that behavior escalates, it gets worse and worse, and they could kill someone. I am part of them getting to stop the cycle of violence.

### **What's your favorite part of the job?**

On the casework side, my favorite part of the job is knowing that I helped someone out and got them back on track, helped them get their lives straightened out.