



ON THE

MOVE

COMMUNITY MOURNS FALLEN DEPUTY

A tribute to AFSCME Local 3433
member Troy Chisum, killed in
the line of duty

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On the MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Putting safety first

It's a matter of life—and death



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO THE SAFEST POSSIBLE WORKING CONDITIONS

This issue of *On the Move* pays special tribute to Troy Chisum, a sheriff's deputy in Fulton County who was killed in the line of duty—shot down while responding to a domestic dispute.

His death is a powerful and painful reminder of the risks that countless public servants face on the job every day. Sometimes, like Troy, they sacrifice their lives. It was just two years ago that DCFS caseworker Pam Knight was brutally beaten when she tried to rescue a child from an abusive father. Pam eventually died from her injuries.

Thankfully, such deaths are rare. But serious, life-changing injuries are not. They happen almost daily—often with little public notice or awareness.

And far too often, they happen needlessly—because of careless or indifferent management that places little value on the health and safety of front-line employees.

McFarland Mental Health Center in central Illinois houses forensic patients, some of whom have committed serious crimes and are known to be violent. Facility management worries incessantly about safeguarding the rights of the patients but has shown no corresponding concern with protecting the rights of staff not to be beaten, battered or abused. When one of the patients recently attempted to strangle a staff member—who lost consciousness and had to be rushed to the hospital—she was made to return to work on that same unit with that same patient.

Just weeks later when a patient with a history of incarceration in state correctional facilities was admitted to McFarland to determine fitness to stand trial, he was placed in a room with access to materials that could readily be “weaponized.” And that’s just what he did—turning a metal door jamb into a small spear and the metal frame of his bed into a battering ram. When staff were called in to restrain the patient, he attacked them with those homemade weapons and two individuals had to be hospitalized.

AFSCME Local 2767 at

McFarland had repeatedly pressed to have patients’ beds attached to the floor so they could not be dismantled and used as weapons—but management refused to make this change because they didn’t want the patients’ environment to seem too institutional—choosing instead to put the safety of employees at greater risk.

At Shapiro Developmental Center, a facility intended to serve individuals with severe developmental disabilities, management claims that it cannot limit the violent outbursts of an individual whose behavior has resulted in over 100 documented staff injuries. Those injuries include kicking a staff member so violently that she suffered permanent damage to her spine and is no longer able to work.

At Chester Mental Health Center an employee was choked nearly to death by a patient known to attack peers and staff. A co-worker saved the employee’s life, but he’s left with a torn disc and two bulging discs in his neck. He’s only 25 years old and may require complex neck surgery.

Assaults on employees in Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice facilities have been steadily rising—by some 50% in each department over a two-year period. Inmates are emboldened to attack staff because consequences are minimal, sometimes nonexistent. After a coordinated assault by youth at IYC St. Charles, a staff member required 17 sutures to repair a gaping injury to his skull. At Lawrence Correctional Center, several staff were injured so severely that they had to be off work for months. At Pontiac Correctional Center, new protocols for inmates with mental illness have greatly reduced security measures and resulted in a growing number of violent attacks on staff.

In all these instances, AFSCME staff and local leaders

have fought back—demanding stronger measures to protect employees. The union has filed grievances, organized protests, held press conferences, taken legal action, and lobbied the state legislature.

Often we’ve had to challenge well-intentioned “advocates” who view injuries to staff as mere collateral damage in their quest to strengthen the rights of patients and inmates. And we’ve had to go toe-to-toe with employers who refuse to implement measures to improve employee safety.


When the departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice were unresponsive to repeated efforts by local unions, AFSCME Council 31 filed a class-action grievance that resulted in an arbitrator’s order that steps must be taken to better protect employees.

After the brutal assault on Pam Knight, AFSCME held a series of meetings with DCFS leadership that resulted in several reforms to strengthen protections for caseworkers.

At McFarland MHC, the local union planned a picket and press conference that elicited a rapid response from top leadership in IDHS, including changes in management personnel at the facility.

We know that having a strong union means better wages and benefits but being AFSCME Strong also means that the fight for safer workplaces continues daily all across our state. Our union is our voice to insist that we deserve safety at work.

There’s no doubt that many jobs in the public sector have an element of risk, but every effort should be made to minimize that risk. No employee should have to risk injury, even death, when preventive measures are possible. We’re not going to accept employer excuses, indifference or uninformed policy rationales—our lives are every bit as valuable as anyone else’s.

Dignity at work means not being subjected to unnecessary dangers. Dignity at work means we have a right to the safest possible working conditions. Dignity at work means that we’re going to keep on fighting until we have the protections we need and deserve. 

State employees ratify new contract

Agreement comes after years of conflict with former governor

A FSCME members overwhelmingly ratified a new state contract this June at more than 400 worksite meetings statewide. The agreement comes after months of negotiations between AFSCME and the Pritzker administration—and nearly four years of conflict with former governor Bruce Rauner.

The respectful and brief negotiations with Governor JB Pritzker's administration stood in stark contrast to the long and tumultuous Rauner years.

The ousted governor walked out on contract talks in January 2016 and refused to even meet with the union bargaining committee for the rest of his term. Instead Rauner tried to unilaterally impose his extreme demands—including doubling employee health care costs and wiping out safeguards against privatization schemes.

But AFSCME thwarted Rauner's efforts at every turn: in the courts, on the streets and, ultimately, helping to defeat him at the ballot box.

"The Rauner era was one of hostility to working people and chaos in state government. AFSCME members got through it by standing together and refusing to be bullied," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "Now state employees have a fair contract and, in Governor Pritzker, an employer who respects their voice and values their work."

The new contract took effect immediately and runs through June 30, 2023.

The long-awaited agreement was ratified by 99% of voting union members who had the opportunity to review the terms and ask questions before casting a ballot.

"The big margin reflects how ready state workers are for the return of sanity and responsible governance in the wake of Bruce Rauner's relentless attacks," Lynch said. "Union members clearly believe this contract is fair for all."


✓ Fair compensation

Despite the state's troubled finances, the AFSCME Bargaining Committee pressed hard for employee wage increases. State employees have received no general increase since July 2014. Under the terms of the new contract, they will receive an initial stipend of \$2,500, followed by pay increases totaling 11.5% starting in January 2020. The contract provides an additional boost for newer employees.

✓ Affordable health insurance

Employee premiums and out-of-pocket costs in the state group health insurance plan will increase, but at a reasonable pace that maintains Illinois's standing in the middle ranks of state employee health plans nationally.

✓ Improved contract language

Among other provisions, the new contract strengthens protections against excessive forced overtime, expands maternity and paternity leave to ten weeks for each parent, creates a new labor-management body to reduce the threat of violence in the workplace and improve worker safety, preserves accountability standards for privatization proposals and creates new protections to safeguard employees' private information. 

Earl Miller

AFSCME Local 1038, Storekeeper, Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education

"We spent four years dealing with Rauner, back and forth, going haywire, getting ready to go on strike—you work that hard you have to feel good about it.

"I've been with the state for 34 years and I really think this is the best contract we've had. We finally got a governor in there that understands how hard we work.

"I love my state job. I'm getting paid to help folks and that's awesome. Now we can all go back to just doing our job and working hard. We don't have to worry about what's going to happen down the road."

Latoya Steel

AFSCME Local 1928, Mental Health Technician, William W. Fox Developmental Center

"We were all excited to vote yes for a new contract. And now I'm ready for harmony in the workplace. Hopefully everyone can have a positive, fair working environment.

"We've seen the worst of it. When you go through stuff like that it brings everyone together. I'm grateful for our strong leaders, our members, and grateful to have a union. If we didn't have one, god forbid, there would have been even more struggle.

"People can see where things can go if we get a governor who isn't union friendly. I hope it gets people smarter as far as voting. Because that's where it starts."

Cody Dornes

AFSCME Local 46, Correctional Officer, East Moline Correctional Center

"We've been waiting a long time for this to get done and it's an amazing contract. It felt good to finally see our fight come to an end after all these years.

"The members felt good about it and I know I feel good about it. The stipend seems like icing on the cake."

Tawny Proulx

AFSCME Local 172, Mental Health Technician, Jack Mabley Developmental Center

"AFSCME members now know how strong we can be when we stand in numbers and don't give up. We got a hell of a contract and it showed how strong our union is.

"The protection on overtime mandation was supreme for a lot of locals like ours. You're mandated every single day. We got them to realize no one can live their life that way, we shouldn't have to be away from our families 16 hours a day every day just to work for the state of Illinois.

"This contract tells our members that AFSCME cares and the union makes life better for the workers. It just shows how important it is to keep fighting."



On August 21, AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch and Governor JB Pritzker signed the new AFSCME state contract surrounded by more than 200 members of the union bargaining committee.

Justice prevails for wrongly accused CNA

Dedicated to her work, AFSCME member fights for what's right

After 15 years of service at the DeKalb County Nursing Home with a spotless record, AFSCME Local 3537 member Cathy Montero was terminated from her job after being accused of stealing a breakfast sausage.

"I've never had any discipline, never been called to the office, except to tell me I'm doing a good job," Montero said. "So when I was called to the office, I didn't think anything of it and didn't bring a union rep with me."

An administrator and the director of nursing were waiting for Montero. They closed the door.

They told Montero that a temporary employee had accused her of stealing a breakfast sausage off the food cart in the cafeteria. They had no evidence other than this one person's word.

Despite her complete denial of the accusation, the administrator said the home has a zero-tolerance policy and fired Montero on the spot.

As she was walked to her desk and locker to gather her belongings, co-workers looked up in utter confusion. Just three days before they had decorated her desk with balloons and cupcakes to celebrate their well-liked co-worker's birthday.

Montero was then walked off the premises. Before she got in her car, she asked the

administrator: "Don't you want to hear what I have to say?" She said, 'It's better if you don't say anything at all' and she watched me get in my car and drive away. I was in shock."

Union steps in

Montero, a dedicated union member, called Local 3537 President Chuck Coulter and told him what happened.

Coulter and Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner worked together to file a grievance on Montero's behalf for wrongful termination. Dorner also ensured that Montero received her unemployment, which the employer contested.

"We have an awesome union team," Montero said. "I can't say enough about how diligently they worked, believing in me and continuing to press forward."

Council 31 attorney Tom Edstrom joined the fight with Coulter and Dorner and aggressively pursued arbitration for wrongful termination with no due process, evidence or just cause.

It worked. The county backed down and voluntarily reinstated Montero.

Back on the job

Montero was fired on May 23 and on August 5 she walked back in the nursing home doors. She was reinstated to her same position as CNA and

"I'm so thankful to our union team."

Ward Secretary—the nurse's right hand—with her same seniority and schedule.

"I'm so thrilled," Montero said the day after she started back at work. "I am so blessed that justice prevailed. And I'm so thankful to our union team."

But Montero said the scars haven't quite healed after going through this ordeal.

"The damage to my credibility and my name was very hurtful, and I'm still torn up about it," Montero said sadly. "Residents love me, and I love them and their family members. I've never had anything bad said against me.

"That's what was so devastating to me. They wouldn't believe me. Instead they took the word of a person who just comes and goes."

But Montero is ready to



AFSCME Local 3537 member Cathy Montero was reinstated on August 5.

push through the hurt and get back to what is most important to her: working hard and doing an excellent job. Her sweet disposition and dedication to the people she serves is evident

from even a short exchange.

Montero was greeted by the residents and by her co-workers with many hugs and smiles.


"I just want to move forward and do what I love to do," she said. "Geriatrics has always been my heart and my life. It was so exciting to come back to see the residents. They asked me where I had been and said they had been worried about me."

AFSCME Strong

"Believe in the union," is Montero's advice to members and non-members alike.

"Look at me, with my clean record, and this still happened to me. It could happen to anybody," she warned. "And if you don't have a union to back you up and to persevere and represent you, you're out of a job."

She said she's always been a committed, dues-paying union member.

"It's so important to appreciate everything our union does," Montero said. "I never would have imagined that something like this could happen to me. Not all stories end so well. Because of our union, mine did." 

21ST BIENNIAL AFSCME Council 31 Convention

Delegates from AFSCME local unions across Illinois will gather in Springfield October 17-19 for Council 31's 21st Biennial Convention. Local union elections for convention delegates are held during August and September.

"AFSCME members have had an incredible two years since our last convention," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "This will be a celebration of everything we've accomplished together, and an opportunity to envision a brighter future."

Some 500 local union delegates will vote on resolutions that will set policy and guide strategy for the coming two years. Along with alternates and guests, they will attend plenary sessions with guest speakers, including International President Lee Saunders, and participate in workshops aimed at strengthening skills to grow our union stronger than ever.

As at past conventions, this gathering will honor members who demonstrate outstanding public service on and off the job. Any AFSCME member can nominate a fellow member for an award. Visit AFSCME31.org/Award to submit a nomination.

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

University employees pushing for fair pay

AFSCME members make higher wages a priority



AFSCME Local 1989 members at NEIU are committed to gaining a step pay plan in their new contract.

Working together, AFSCME members at public universities around the state who are currently in contract negotiations are making the case for fair wages and step plans that reward years of experience and loyalty.

It hasn't been easy, but higher education workers at Illinois State University (ISU) in Normal, Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb and Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) in Chicago won't quit standing up for themselves and their fellow employees.

ISU: Pay a living wage!

Members of AFSCME Locals 1110 and 3236 at ISU have been working under an expired contract for more than a year. Stepping up pressure for a fair agreement, they brought their case for a living wage to the ISU board of trustees meeting on July 26.

These more than 500 buildings and grounds, dining, clerical, library and health care employees have been negotiating a new contract for more than a year but the university has been stalling on real wage increases, said AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler, leaving employees to fall behind while the cost of living goes up.

"Some employees are finding it unaffordable to work at ISU or they need second jobs,"

Nestler testified to the board.

"With ISU expecting its largest freshman class ever, having had the best fundraising year ever and set to receive a 5% increase in state appropriations, why isn't there a willingness to invest in these dedicated employees?"

ISU employees are paid \$1.50 to \$3.00 an hour less than employees at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign doing similar work with the same titles, civil service tests and hiring procedures. At the same time, employees aren't rewarded for longevity and are working harder than ever as positions remain unfilled.

The next bargaining session is scheduled for late August.

Setting the standard at NIU

Two AFSCME bargaining units covering nearly 900 employees in administrative, building, housing and dining services at NIU have proven to be a powerful force for negotiating fair wages for all campus workers.

AFSCME Local 1890 members have had their first union contract in place with NIU for a

year now and a successor agreement for Local 963 members at the university has been in place for roughly the same time.

Local 1890 organized several years ago and had to fight to finally get their signed union contract. After a prolonged struggle with the administration, they won guaranteed 3% annual raises in every year of their contract or the campus-wide raise, whichever is

Sara Dorner said. "They never would have done that had we not pushed for it."

"Never in the seven years I've been there did they pay us raises—until they were forced to," said Debbie Williams, the local's membership chair and a bargaining committee member. "If it weren't for us, fighting and holding on to that three percent, nobody would have gotten it."



AFSCME Locals 1110 and 3236 testified at the ISU board meeting on July 26.

higher. Local 963 was then able to secure the same.

"Despite not giving raises for years, the university decided to give the entire campus a three percent raise during our negotiations," AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative

Williams said she and her fellow members also secured an additional 3% raise for the second year of the agreement so she anticipates the university will again make it a campus-wide increase.

"They never wanted us

to have a union and now they don't want us making them look bad," Williams said. "They don't want AFSCME members to be the only ones getting a raise because then other employees will start pushing back too."

Setting the standard on campus is an accomplishment that AFSCME members can be proud of, Dorner said.

"Because they fought, picketed, rallied and organized for a fair wage increase, everyone else on campus is getting one too."

Step plan the focus at NEIU

After working for almost a year under an expired contract, NEIU employees represented by AFSCME Local 1989 are still pushing hard to reach a new agreement. The union members are committed to gaining a step pay plan that rewards loyalty and ensures that wages keep up with inflation.

"Everything goes up—rent, electricity, gas and water," said Lucia Campo, a 20-year NEIU employee. "But my salary does not go up. It makes it very difficult to maintain a home of four people."


When adjusted for Chicago's cost of living, NEIU has the most lowest-paid civil service classifications in the Illinois

"It's time to make us a priority."

public university system. Even in areas where the cost of living is much lower, commensurate staff salaries are higher.

A step plan would ensure that each employee has a ladder with rungs to climb from the bottom to the top, said Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.

NEIU employees have endured two multi-week furloughs and a round of layoffs that has increased workloads for those that remain. They want to see a fair reward for their dedication.

"NEIU employees are dedicated to student success," said Tracy McFall, who has worked at the university for 12 years. "It's time to make us—the people who are the heart, soul and face of this university—a priority." 

CGH Medical Center employees hope to join AFSCME

Employees at CGH Medical Center in Sterling are organizing to form their union with AFSCME. They are seeking fair treatment, better staffing levels, higher pay and—most importantly—respect.

But management at the city-owned hospital is trying to block their efforts.

Several CGH workers reached out to AFSCME this spring with concerns about their work environment and they decided to move forward and organize their union.

Since then, the hospital has begun a campaign to quash the organizing effort through anti-union meetings and spreading false information.

“Management is definitely trying to create a culture of fear,” AFSCME Council 31 Organizing Director Abbey Davis said. “But courage is contagious, and these workers are speaking up for themselves and their patients.”

“There’s a lot that can be fixed at the hospital that I don’t think will happen without a union,” said Ashley Nares, a medical assistant at the clinic. “We need a voice that’s listened to and forming a union is already forcing them to listen and have conversations where we weren’t having them before.”

The organizing effort encompasses 1,500 employees at the hospital, including nurses, CNAs, medical assistants, maintenance workers, dietary service workers and housekeeping staff.

Nares knows the benefits of union membership. Her stepfather was in the pipefitters union and her husband is a member of AFSCME Local 817 at Dixon Correctional Center.

Nares has two small children—a six-month-old baby boy and a nearly two-year-old girl. She struggled with two unpaid maternity leaves while her husband enjoys paid leave under his union contract.

Better patient care

Jodi Thompson, a registered nurse at CGH who’s worked at the hospital for 27 years, told reporters that the fight to form their union is about more than just the employees. It’s about the hospital keeping

its commitment to the community by retaining staff.

“CGH, we rock,” Thompson said. “We want to make CGH as strong as we can; it has to have strong leaders and strong workers.”

Nares agrees that staffing levels are one of the biggest driving concerns of pro-union employees.

“We’ve had a big problem with turnover of longtime employees and that speaks volumes,” she said. “People who have been here more than 30 years are leaving and we’re having a hard time getting staff in the door so we have more open positions than we’ve ever had since I started working here seven



CGH employees testified to the Sterling City Council on July 15, delivering signatures of support from community leaders.

years ago.”

Better pay to compete with other local hospitals and basic rights and protections for workers would go a long way toward fixing the staffing problem, Nares said.

Supporters bolster workers

On July 15, pro-union employees and supporters packed the usually sleepy city council chambers at the council’s monthly meeting to

testify about the need for a union to improve patient care and working conditions, and especially to retain quality staff.

Asking Mayor Skip Lee to remain neutral—or better yet, intervene on their behalf—they also delivered a statement of support signed by more than 100 community leaders.

“AFSCME members and retirees have gone out of their way to talk to CGH workers and support them,” Davis said. “Local presidents and retirees

testified to city council, wrote letters to the editor of the local newspaper and facilitated a Q and A session to discuss the benefits of union membership.”

In addition to local members, two AFSCME-represented nurses from California travelled to Sterling to join the Q and A panel. They shared their experience with the union and how it has addressed many issues that are unique to hospital workers.

Chelsea Kreuger, an AFSCME member from

Willowglen Academy, a community disability agency, also joined the panel to talk about her experience forming a union.

“I know what it’s like to go through the process,” Kreuger told the workers. “It’s so tough, I know. But it’s so worth it in the end.”

Taking it to the next level

Now pro-union CGH employees are busy talking to their co-workers and encouraging them to sign a union card.

“Because it’s a public hospital, there will be no election,” Davis said. “Instead, the union can be certified when a majority of employees sign union cards. That means signing a card is your vote, so in a sense the election is happening as we speak.”

Nares isn’t afraid to voice her opinion, she said, but she understands that the process can be scary for some.

“People don’t want to feel like their jobs are threatened because they’re speaking out,” she said.

“But that’s not true and I’ve seen it. We are the union. We will be the voice that management hears. Right now, we have no protection, they can do what they want. But with our union, our rights will be in writing and they can’t change that.”

Union family honors fallen co-worker

A FSCME Local 2073 member Allissa Martin was at a Cardinals-Cubs baseball game in St. Louis when she fell to her death after an altercation with her husband on June 2.

Martin was just 27 years old and a correctional officer at Logan Correctional Center. Her husband—Bradly Jenkins—was a lieutenant at the same facility. The two were newlyweds, married less than a month.

Martin recorded her final moments on her cell phone. She and Jenkins were fighting on a parking garage, and on the video Martin yelled for Jenkins to stop punching her face. She screamed before she fell from the garage.

Police found Martin already dead and Jenkins straddling her body. Jenkins was charged with third-degree domestic assault and is currently out on bond.

Celebration of life

Local 2073 members held a Celebration of Life in Martin's honor on August 10. More than 450 AFSCME members and their families gathered

to mourn the loss of their co-worker and friend, and to celebrate the impact she had on their lives.

"Every year we have a union family party. We figured there would be no better way to preserve her memory than to have the party in her honor," Local 2073 President Shaun Dawson said. "From this day forward it will always be the Allissa Martin celebration.

"Officer Martin was every day a positive person," Dawson noted. "Regardless of how bad the day was going, she had the ability to turn it around. She always made sure that people were as happy as she was... or seemed to be."

Inviting Martin's family to join them, the union unveiled a commemorative plaque with Martin's name and badge number. It also says, "End of Watch 6-2-2019."

The plaque will hang in the roll call room at Logan.

"Her watch may have ended



AFSCME Local 2073 members paid tribute to Officer Allissa Martin at Logan Correctional Center with a plaque in her honor.

that day, but it continues as she watches over those of us who are left behind," Dawson said. "Everyone will know who Allissa Martin is and the impact she had on our facility."

Raising awareness


Purple—the color of support for domestic violence victims—was the dominant color at the

"Everyone will know who Allissa Martin is and the impact she had on our facility."

celebration for Martin.

"Domestic violence is an issue that lurks in the shadows," Dawson said. "The people affected by it don't want anyone to know about the problems

that exist behind closed doors.

"What we want is to make sure they know there is help. There are people you can talk to on the other side of those doors. You aren't alone." 

Local 1028 member wins national scholarship



A FSCME Local 1028 member Katrice Sawyer's work as a public employee and community volunteer made her a standout in the national competition for AFSCME's Gerald W. McEntee Scholarship.

A legal secretary at the Will County State's Attorney Office, Sawyer was selected because she "best exemplifies former President McEntee's commitment to strengthening our union through organizing, building political power, defending workers' rights and supporting public services."

Sawyer is enrolled at Governor State University to earn a dual master's degree in public administration and political

justice studies. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science.

In addition to her job and schoolwork, Sawyer is generous with her time as a volunteer. She helps domestic violence victims who have fled their spouses get protection orders and find shelter and food and has been a "big sister" for the last five years. She also helps raise funds for National Hook-Up of Black Women, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of

families.

With all this, Sawyer still makes time to be an active union member with Local 1028. She attends her monthly union meetings and informs new members about the importance of joining AFSCME.

"We went on strike a few years ago and it felt good to fight for something and win it. To make our voices heard," Sawyer said. "I always tell new employees that the more people we have, the stronger we become. We're stronger together."

Sawyer works hard. She has a 3.89 GPA in her master's program.

"Some people might feel that since you're working, as long as you get your degree you don't have to worry about grades. But I want to know I am doing my best, not just enough to get by."

Sawyer certainly does that in life, too. 

Learn about scholarship opportunities for AFSCME members, retirees and their children at AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships.



AFSCME LOCAL 612 AWARDS SCHOLARSHIP

Macon County employees of AFSCME Local 612 awarded their annual academic scholarship to Jacob Powell.

The son of AFSCME member Sara Powell at the Circuit Clerk's office, Jacob graduated from high school in May with honors and is a member of the National Honor Society. Jacob heads to Richland Community College this fall.



PHOTO: PJSTAR.COM

Fulton County Sheriff Jeff Standard pays tribute to Deputy Troy Chisum, a member of AFSCME Local 3433, at his funeral in Cuba.

Sheriff's deputy Troy Chisum killed in line of duty

Fulton County community mourns tragic loss

Fulton County deputies were dispatched to a rural address in Avon, Illinois on Tuesday, June 25 for a report of an assault, possibly with severe injuries. Minutes closer than any other officer, AFSCME Local 3433 member Deputy Troy Chisum was first on the scene.

Deputy Chisum attempted to speak to the person who was sitting on the porch, but the person went into the house. Deputy Chisum knocked on the door.

At that time, the other deputies now at the scene heard a gunshot. They saw Deputy Chisum turn and run off the porch. A second shot rang out and he fell to the ground. Deputy Chisum died from his injuries.

"This tragic incident is a painful reminder of the risks that so many public servants face as they serve their communities," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "Our union is profoundly grateful for the service of our brother, Troy Chisum. We grieve with his family and all who knew and loved him."

Chisum, 39, lived in Canton and was married with three daughters. A county sheriff's deputy for more than four years, he had also served as a medic and fire fighter.

"He was always in public service, that's just who he was," said his longtime friend and fellow deputy Ryan Maricle.

Nathan Woodring, the shooting suspect, was charged with first-degree murder and faces up to life in prison if convicted, with a minimum sentence of 45 years behind bars.

AFSCME comes together

AFSCME Local 3433 President Trudy Williams—also a Council 31 executive board member—and Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Lynch

worked closely with county officials and AFSCME members in the aftermath of the shooting.

"I went right over to the sheriff's department that evening," Williams said, "everyone just wanted to help Troy's family as best they could. All politics and egos were set aside. You'd like to think that the best is going to come out of people in a situation like this and it certainly did here. It was stunning."

Williams also called Steve Howerter, president of AFSCME Local 3585 at Illinois River Correctional Center, because he's part of the trained Department of Corrections crisis response team.

"When I got the call, they told me that there were a bunch of people at the jail and there was nobody down there for them to talk to," Howerter recalled. "I talked to the facilities coordinator at Illinois River and we got four of us to go down there that night.

"We talked to the jail staff and some of the civilian staff about how they were doing, if they have a good support group outside of work, if they have healthy coping mechanisms," Howerter



PHOTO: PJSTAR.COM

Troy Chisum's wife, Amanda Chisum (right), embraces their daughter Abigail at the funeral service on July 1.

“The funeral procession was ten miles long. There were police cars from every county in the state, out of state, New York City, fire fighters, a life flight crew and EMT units from surrounding areas. Employees walked out of work and stood on the road. He touched so many lives, wore so many hats. You can’t imagine the sight, and the quiet. You have so many people, yet it was just quiet.”

AFSCME LOCAL 3433 PRESIDENT TRUDY WILLIAMS



PHOTO: SHEILA HOWERTER

Volunteers placed more than 1,000 flags along the funeral procession in Chisum's honor.

er said. “We put together a list of local resources for counseling and other services.”

“It happened on a Tuesday afternoon. Food started coming in that night,” Williams said. “The sheriff’s department was just overwhelmed. Businesses put out ribbons in his honor.”

Those closest to Chisum felt well cared for.

“The union has been wonderful,” Maricle said. “Randy [Lynch] was one of the first people to make a phone call to me that day. That means a lot.”

The union contract provides for the deputy’s family to receive a full year of wages and benefits. The local is working on a memorandum of understanding to extend further support and establish a permanent memorial to Troy.

Community honors a hero

The Sheriff’s department employees were shaken by the tragic loss of Deputy Chisum.

“We’re a strong, close department. We’re all friends and we have no problems talking to each other if something bothers us,” Maricle said. “We have one another’s back. We are each other’s family.”

The whole community mourned along with them.

“In no one’s recollection has a county officer been killed in the line of duty,” Williams said. “You don’t know how something will feel until you experience it. Fulton County didn’t know until it knew. That kind of thing doesn’t happen here—and then it did.

“If any good can come out of this it will be that people will be more aware of what their

county employees do every day and face every day.”

Chisum’s fellow deputies and first responders from surrounding counties formed a procession of more than 100 emergency vehicles outside the hospital where his body was taken.

“The community has been unbelievable. People are so caring and giving,” Maricle said. “The day we drove from the coroner’s office, every overpass had a fire truck with people saluting. Every person that wasn’t busy or out of town was standing on that road. It was the most emotional thing I’ve ever seen in my life.”

“Everyone helped hang more than 1,000 American flags in 90-degree heat for the funeral procession,” Williams said. “They lined the road for miles. It was absolutely beautiful.”

Hundreds of people from the area, across the state and the country joined the funeral procession and filled the Cuba Middle-High School gym to honor Chisum.

“In this outpouring of support, we saw there are more people that support us than not,” Maricle said. “It was a horrible situation, a tragedy, but to see the community come together helps our morale.”

PRITZKER SIGNS LAW INCREASING DEATH BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES OF FIRST RESPONDERS

A day after AFSCME Local 3433 member Troy Chisum’s death, Governor JB Pritzker signed a law doubling death benefits for fire fighters and law enforcement officers, including local and state correctional employees, killed in the line of duty.

The measure, HB 2028, was backed by AFSCME because the previous law capped state reimbursements for burial costs at \$10,000. Now the families of those killed in the line of duty will receive up to \$20,000. The law is retroactively effective to June 30, 2018.

“While no amount of money can ease the terrible grief of families who have lost their loved ones because they were killed in the line of duty, I hope we can at least lessen the financial burden of an immeasurable loss of our state’s finest,” Gov. Pritzker said. “My heart breaks for the families, friends and fellow first responders every time a brave soul leaves us in the noblest of ways. A grateful state will always honor your legacies.”

“This new law honors the sacrifices of those public servants who put themselves at risk every day,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “We hope the additional funds will help Troy’s family as they deal with their unthinkable loss.”

Battle to save Hope Creek continues

AFSCME members protest potential sale of county nursing home



AFSCME Local 2371 member Cheryl Campbell testifies to the Rock Island County Board.

Attempts to sell or privatize Hope Creek Care Center have become almost habitual in Rock Island County. Despite the home being a fixture in the community since the 1800s, the question of whether the county will keep it has been ongoing for the past several years.

Through it all, AFSCME Local 2371 members have always been there, fighting against political efforts to unload the public home. They successfully beat back a particularly aggressive attempt to privatize the home in 2013, just four years after the county re-opened the center in a brand-new East Moline facility.

But never has the option of sale been as threatening as it is today.

Years of financial mismanagement have left the home in massive debt. According to county administrator Jim Snider, Hope Creek is \$7.5 million in debt, including \$2.5 million owed to vendors—like contracted nursing and physical therapy services.

It also owes the county \$3.4 million. The county has repeatedly used its general fund to cover costs incurred by the home, including payroll.

And now the county board has made a big move. On June 18 board members voted 16-5 to authorize a request for proposals to purchase the home.

A constant fight

“Hope Creek has always been a political football,” said Local 2371 President Rhonda

Westmorland. “I’ve worked there almost 20 years and it seems like there’s always a fight to keep the home. And now we’re back at it again.”

Westmorland said the facility has laid off workers and closed two floors to cut costs. Her own position as a social worker was recently cut and she moved into a receptionist position (she’s now on medical leave).

But she said these measures haven’t helped and are actually hurting the home’s ability to stay afloat.

“By closing those two floors, we’ve crowded our short-term floor, which is meant for people recovering from surgeries and getting rehab,” she said. “So now there isn’t the room for short-term patients and that’s a money-maker.”

AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt agrees.

“They are making moves that aren’t smart and haven’t listened to the good ideas we’ve been suggesting over the years,” Schmidt said. “They have excess capacity right now, but there’s a waitlist of people who want single rooms. They could convert the empty double occupancy rooms into singles,

but they haven’t.”

Schmidt said Hope Creek has also added a lot of higher-paid management positions while short staffing is a real problem on the ground.

“We’ve been at every board meeting, sharing our concerns and offering ideas,” Schmidt said. “They’ve known for years the home has been in a precarious financial situation, teetering on bankruptcy, but nothing was done.”

Residents at risk

Westmorland said her number one concern is the residents and she knows her co-workers feel the same way. They feel the

county is only looking at the home in terms of financials, but frontline employees are thinking of the residents and families they have worked with for years.

“The community won’t have a place to go,” Westmorland worried. “I can’t tell you

“It’s never been about us; it’s about saving our residents.”

how heartbreaking it is to hear residents cry and ask, where am I going to live?”

“I’ve been trying to say, ‘thank you’ to all of the employees because they deserve to be thanked,” resident Don Peterson told the Quad City Times. “I try to express my gratitude to each of them as I see them. I know it affects me, but it affects them just as much.”

The board would have to approve a sale by a two-thirds majority. But statements to the press by board members aren’t promising.

“I’d say our backs are to the wall,” said County Board Chairman Richard Brunk.

“There could be a turn around, but there are so many things that would have to align for this turn around to happen,” said board member Drue

Mielke. “I think it’s at that point where there is no other option.”

At the bargaining table

Similarly bleak statements have been made at the bargaining table with Local 2371 members.

Westmorland said bargaining has been difficult and the union committee hasn’t even raised economic issues yet. But again, she emphasized that resident well-being is the employees’ first priority.

“Our local is as strong as ever,” she said. “We want our facility saved. It’s never been about us; it’s about saving our residents.”

She said that she’s bolstered by the support of her fellow union members in the Quad City Federation of Labor and other local AFSCME unions—and the families of Hope Creek residents—who have come out to show their support for the home.

The employees of Hope Creek remain committed to fighting to keep the nursing home public for the benefit of the entire community.

“The board is talking about selling and our residents are worried about where they are going to live,” she said. “What happened to taking care of our community? Isn’t that what Hope Creek was supposed to be about?”



AFSCME members and local residents show support for the care center at the county board meeting.

Mental health center employees demand safe conditions

A FSCME Local 2767 members at the McFarland Mental Health Center in Springfield were being repeatedly subjected to violent attacks by high-risk patients.

Staff continually alerted management to the alarming pattern of attacks but their pleas for safety improvements for workers and patients alike fell on deaf ears.

McFarland is a state-run psychiatric hospital treating approximately 150 patients at a time, including individuals held as an alternative to incarceration after having committed a crime but found not guilty by reason of insanity or mentally unfit to stand trial.

Under the AFSCME-backed workplace violence reporting law that took effect in January, the Department of Human Services reported 17 serious attacks on staff in the first quarter of 2019 alone.

"Employees urged management to increase hiring, improve training, provide needed equipment and make other changes to improve

safety," AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Jessica Derhake said. "But instead of addressing staff concerns, management told employees that

Assaults should not be "part of the job."

assaults should be expected as 'part of the job.'"

After a female employee was choked until she lost consciousness in late June, then forced to work in close proximity to her attacker, AFSCME members decided to hold a news conference to alert the public to the dangerous working conditions and lack of management response.




McFarland Mental Health Center employees are standing up for safe working conditions.

In response, top Department of Human Services officials agreed to meet promptly with local union leaders to hear and address concerns.

At the meeting, DHS committed to making a number of changes demanded by the local union, including: better staffing;

new equipment like an adequate number of radios; an electronic system for direct reporting of incidents and assaults; more and better training on appropriate techniques for the complex needs and aggressive behaviors of McFarland patients; and other safety steps like adding

a security gate and eliminating potential hazards.

"While the meeting was a big step in the right direction," Derhake said, "AFSCME will continue to hold management accountable to their pledges to ensure the safety of every employee and patient." 



AFSCME Local 2025 member Deanna Brumbaugh was reinstated with back pay.

Member gets job back with union help

A FSCME Local 2025 member Deanna Brumbaugh was working as a nurse at the Rock Island County jail when her co-worker, the longtime jail physician, passed away.

The county outsourced the position to Mend Correctional Care out of Minnesota and a new doctor took over in January 2018.

The contract with Mend provided that the new physician had to work with Brumbaugh, who would remain a county employee. However, within a few months the working relationship soured when Brumbaugh blew the whistle on what she perceived to be illegal activity.

Shortly after that, she was fired. The county claimed Mend would no longer cover her under their licensure.

AFSCME immediately filed a grievance on her behalf, saying the employer had not followed the contract in this termination. The union eventually

took the case to arbitration.

But like all legal proceedings, the grievance process can be slow. Brumbaugh's case finally went before an arbitrator in February 2019.

While off the job, Brumbaugh had used as much unemployment as possible (six months) and obtained a part-time job. She was unable to get employment as a nurse because she'd been terminated from her position.


In May the good news finally arrived: The arbitrator sided with Brumbaugh, saying the county had failed to establish justification for the discharge. The employer was ordered to provide Brumbaugh with back pay, minus ten days.

"The arbitrator said the county had to return me to work and make me whole," Brumbaugh said. "If there wasn't a job available at the medical unit in the jail, I had to be put somewhere commensurate with my education, training and wage level."

After some additional meetings with the arbitrator to obtain a secure and appropriate position for Brumbaugh, she was hired as a sanitarian in the county health department.

"I loved my job at the jail but this is a good fit for me too," Brumbaugh said of her new position that began July 15.

Now that Brumbaugh is back at work, she's looking forward to receiving nearly 14 months in back pay.

"The last year was a boatload of stress," she said. "I've never been fired, and I did nothing wrong. I did nothing illegal. They didn't like me, so they got rid of me. Thankfully I was union so I could do something about it." 

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME members who are employees of Wexford, a private health care vendor in IDOC facilities, celebrate their 20-year union anniversary and new contract.

20 years union for Wexford employees

THIS JULY EMPLOYEES OF Wexford Health Sources Inc. at Illinois correctional facilities celebrated a two-year contract agreement and their 20-year union anniversary.

Members of AFSCME corrections locals across the state, more than 1,000 nurses, LPNs, CNAs, nurse practitioners, medical assistants, dental assistants, psychiatrists and mental health professionals working in adult correctional facilities are employed by Wexford, a private

“We have fought so hard for a living wage.”

medical contractor.

Wexford is a difficult employer to bargain with, said members of the bargaining committee.

“I was shocked to realize I work for a company that knows so little about their people,” said Ashtyn Rennels, a dental hygienist at Danville Correctional Center and a member of AFSCME Local 2052. She’s worked for Wexford for five years. This is the first time she’s served on the bargaining committee.

“The union does a lot for us,” she said. “The [rights and benefits] we have are mainly because the union has done it, not Wexford.”

The committee was able to negotiate a guaranteed minimum wage increase of 2.5% a year for the remaining two years of the contract and upgrade many classifications to be competitive with market rates for those fields. Recruitment is difficult for the company, especially in more densely populated areas like Chicago.

“We ensured equity adjustments in this contract for the first time in years,” said AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Joe Pluger who led negotiations along with Staff Representative Ty Petersen. “These increases are long overdue and should help to alleviate short staffing in certain areas.”

Bringing wages up in the private company is something AFSCME started 20 years ago. The first contract with private health care contractors in corrections was signed in 1999 and in 2004 several contracts were combined into one large state contract with Wexford.

“When we all came together, we were all brought up to the highest pay scale. That move made us even more powerful,” said Kathy Kissiar, a Local 494 member and staff assistant at Pontiac Correctional Center with 30 years of experience working in the state prison system.

Kissiar has been on the negotiating team for every contract since she became a union member 20 years ago. She said it’s been an ongoing challenge to get fair wages and benefits from private contractors.

“We have fought so hard for a living wage that’s comparable to what employees of

the Department of Corrections make,” she said. “But we still have a long way to go to have parity with the state.”

She said Wexford tries to compare their workers to those doing similar jobs in the private sector.

“But we’re in a prison setting. You never know what the day is going to bring you,” she said. “It’s really tough sitting across the table from a company that has no clue what we do.”

AFSCME members at Wexford have never given up fighting for what they deserve. Over the years they’ve won wage increases, a grievance process, and paid time off that’s comparable to state employees.

Both Rennels and Kissiar are proud of the work they do every day.

“I love my job,” said Rennels. “I have a list of 150 guys that are waiting on me right now for teeth cleanings, exams and x-rays. A lot of guys have never even been to a dentist so it can be super rewarding.”

“I’m passionate about the job I do,” said Kissiar, “and I am committed to the role I play as union steward, [executive] board member and on the third-level grievance committee.”

She said the bargaining committee was a steadfast team comprised of both new and veteran employees. Along with Kissiar and Rennels, the bargaining team included members of every Wexford local: Sarah Speece, Tisha Brashear-Finney, Julie Klein, Megan Jording, Trent Lapp, Kathy Kissiar, Todd Nelson, Christine Alexander, Kaley Johnson, Tasha Woods,

Niki Bonnell, Mary Rogers, Amy Jones, Jacob Weatherford, Talitha Brooks, Andrea Russell, Ashtyn Rennels, Kirsten Lolling, Bettie Jones, Susette Doyle, Susan Robinson, Marci Smith, Kim Stephens, Randy Emerson, Shaliza Odom and Kristen Minor.

“We have more work to do,” Kissiar said. “Our wheels are turning all the time about adjustments we need to make next time around. We’re all about what’s right and fair and what’s best for our members.”

Safeguarding affordable health care in Rockford

AFSCME LOCAL 1058 MEMBERS at the City of Rockford held the line on health care costs in a contract reopener this summer.

After negotiating for more than a year, Local 1058 pushed back on the city’s efforts to increase health care premiums and locked in rates until 2025 with only modest increases.

“We knew that in a way we’re also bargaining for our fellow members in other city agencies,” Local 1058 President Christina Loudermilk said. “We had to make sure to hold the line and get something we can all live with and afford.”

Loudermilk is a tree trimmer who has worked for the city for 21 years. Her local represents city employees and the building department—the 200 employees under this agreement—as well as an additional 70 employees at the Rockford

“We had to make sure to hold the line.”



Local 1058 President Christina Loudermilk (right) shakes hands with City of Rockford’s HR director, Shurice Hunter.

Housing Authority and federal Head Start program.

Health insurance costs will remain status quo for 2019 and then the employees' share will increase modestly and remain steady for six years.

The city employees' bargaining team also secured 2% wage increases in each year of the contract, with the first increase retroactive to January 2019, and a signing bonus.

The contract was ratified by members this July and the city council approved it in August. Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Christopher Hooser and Loudermilk, the bargaining team included Tony Garcia, Stephanie Buzzo, AJ Indovina, Steve Mangruen, Sue Whitley, Laura Anderson, Tracy Pauley, Darius Morrow, Annette Summerfield, Bob Rever and Ron Remigal.

"We started with a lot of differences," Loudermilk said, "but everybody ultimately came together."

Quad Cities 911 dispatchers stand strong

FOUR ROCK ISLAND COUNTY governing bodies—Moline, East Moline, Silvis and Milan—consolidated their 911 operation to comply with an Illinois state mandate to reduce the number of county call centers.

Members of AFSCME Locals 1132 and 1234 were brought under one roof. They voted to join together in Local 1234 and negotiated their first contract with their new employer, QComm 911.

It wasn't easy.

"The process was really hard," said 911 dispatcher and bargaining team member Angie Gillette. "We were trying to get a good wage and benefit plan, but we had also worked 3,000 hours of overtime since January 1st. It wasn't safe and we had to make a stand."

The dispatchers took their case to the streets and picketed their employer about the unsafe conditions created by excessive mandatory overtime.

"It was alarming," Gillette said. "I've been a dispatcher for 10 years and I've never been concerned about police, fire fighter and public safety until now. I felt something was going to fall through the cracks and that didn't need to happen."



The AFSCME Local 2515 Mosaic bargaining committee helped secure the group's second union contract.

The local ultimately took a strike authorization vote and 100 percent of the membership voted yes. The labor board denied the employees' right to strike because the dispatchers are essential public safety workers, but the move sent a clear message to the public and their employer.

The vote pushed the employer back to the table and after just a few more sessions the two sides hammered out a deal.

The four different dispatch operations each had their own wage scale and health insurance, with total compensation varying. Gillette said the new employer was trying to go with

the lowest option for each, but the union members would not stand for it.

"They stood up for themselves," said AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt who led negotiations with bargaining team members Gillette, Margo Sparbel, Scott Ryckeghem, Colleen Cusack, Kami Johnson, Stacy Houzenga and Sara Parker. "They are an incredible group."

The bargaining team secured the highest wage floor of the four scales and the best insurance plan. And most importantly the union members won a safe overtime policy.

Now the employer cannot

"Now that the staff have a voice, things have really improved."

mandate more than 12 hours consecutively. Employees can work a 16-hour shift voluntarily, but not on a mandation. QComm 911 has also hired additional dispatchers to ensure adequate staffing levels for the call volume.

"It was amazing," Gillette said. "I don't think we would have been able to get this far or get this much without our union. Having a union backing us made us a lot stronger."

Second union contract for Mosaic employees

DIRECT SERVICE PERSONNEL (DSPs) at Mosaic in Rockford made further gains in wages and protections in their second AFSCME contract.

The second time at the table was better, said chapter chair LaToya Johnson.

"Management didn't want to budge the first time around," Johnson said. "But our relationship with management has improved since we've had a union and our bargaining team was stronger and more prepared. People weren't afraid to speak up."

Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner, the Local 2515 bargaining team representing 50 employees included new and veteran DSPs: Johnson, Jackie


Curry, Kim Walton, Karen Darby, Ruth Brinson and Elsie Neal.

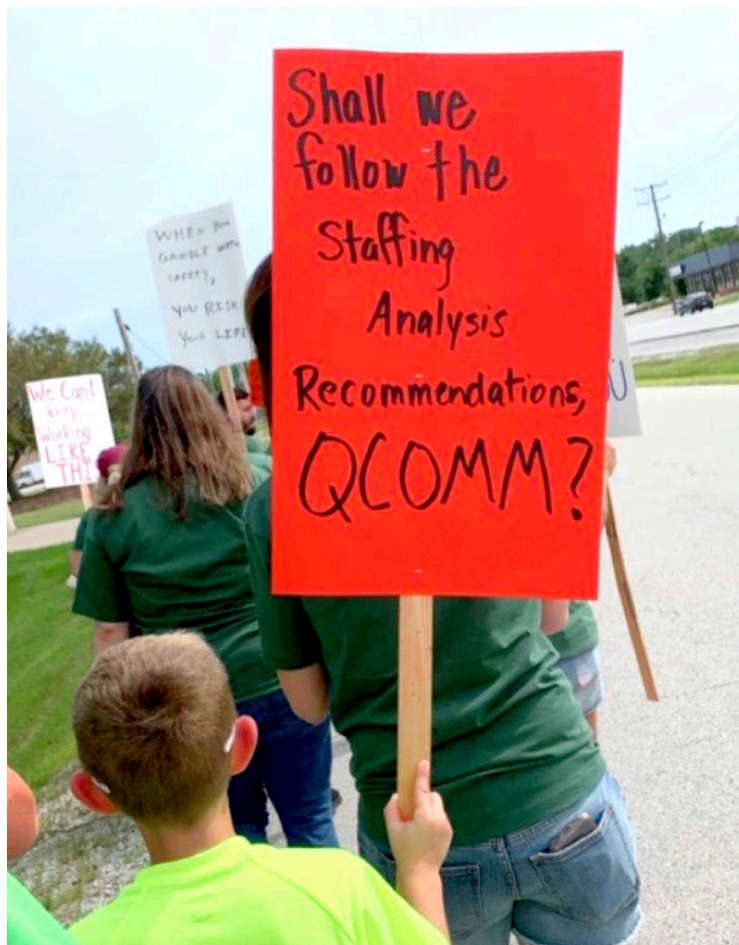
"The most difficult thing we had to do was the economics," Johnson said. "They told us our wage proposal was a fairy tale and that was very insulting, especially because we do so much, passing medications, doctor visits, cooking, cleaning, and more."

But the union members didn't give up and the bargaining team secured a 65-cent hourly raise in the first year of the contract—on top of three percent annual anniversary increases—with wage reopeners the next two years.

Since forming a union, Mosaic employees have better wages and benefits, plus holiday and weekend pay that they never had before. They have also joined with hundreds of DSPs across the state who are lobbying elected officials and the governor to increase reimbursement rates to state-funded community disability agencies.

"Now that the staff have a voice, things have really improved," Johnson said. "Our company is finally realizing that staff care about the clients. They know we're not here just for the money. And we've pushed management to be more proactive in improving care."

"Better pay will equal better care," Johnson said. She's determined to see that vision become a reality. 



911 dispatchers—members of AFSCME Local 1234—calling for safe staffing levels.



Are You Approaching Retirement?

The attacks against our pensions, Social Security and Medicare are real and will continue. We worked hard to earn our retirement benefits and they need protecting!

Retiree Chapter 31 is leading the battle to maintain your retirement security. Be a part of that fight! Membership is just \$3 per month. With 35 retiree sub-chapters across Illinois, don't pass up the opportunity to defend your dignity and security in retirement!

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Questions? Contact Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe at 217-788-2800 or mbritton-sipe@afscme31.org

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Retiree Council visits Congress

AFSCME RETIREES FROM across the country met on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. from July 23 to 25 for their annual meeting. Chapter 31 Vice President Mary Jones and Treasurer Alma Wingard represented Illinois retirees at the summit.

"There are nearly a quarter of a million public sector retirees in AFSCME and together we are a massive political force," said Wingard. "We must stay engaged and mobilized, not only to protect retirement security but to ensure that the labor movement, which plays such a vital role in fighting for a fair economy, can continue to grow."

The meeting included lobbying on Capitol Hill focused on the following issues:

- **Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid:** Retirees urge the protection and expansion of these programs and oppose any efforts to privatize or create individual retirement accounts. They are pushing for a cost-of-living adjustment that lifts everyone up.
- **Affordable Health Care:** Retirees are pressing to lower the price of prescription drugs, provide consumer protections from surprise medical bills and unexpected charges from out-of-network providers for emergency care. They also want to repeal the 40% tax on high-cost worker and retiree health benefits.
- **Labor Rights:** Retirees seek the same protections for

public service employees as those afforded to workers in the private sector. The Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act (H.R. 3463 and S. 1970) as well as the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 2474 and S. 1306) are two pieces of legislation that protect collective bargaining rights and make it easier to form unions.

In focus: IMRF

CHAPTER 31 RETIREE MEMBERS participate in various public sector retirement systems, including the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF).

While the IMRF is the largest and best-funded pension plan in Illinois, it's not insulated from attacks on public employee retirement security.

IMRF was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1939. It provides retirement, disability and death benefits to employees of more than 3,000 local governments and school districts in the state, covering 176,517 employees, 133,261 retirees and 119,937 inactive participants.

Because defined benefit pensions pool contributions, they produce hefty investment returns. The average IMRF retiree has 19 years of service and receives an annual benefit of \$19,838. Of each pension dollar paid out to retirees, 62 cents come from investment earnings, 26 cents from IMRF employers, and 12 cents from IMRF employees.

The pooling of contributions combined with a professional investment team and a statute that guarantees funding has resulted in IMRF being 90% funded. Despite its strength, many proposals targeting pension benefits in recent years have included IMRF participants.

"While AFSCME continues efforts to educate lawmakers and the public on the importance of the defined benefit pension, members and retirees must engage in these efforts and help educate other participants," said AFSCME Local 3433 president Trudy Williams, who holds an elected seat on the IMRF Board of Trustees. "The IMRF is a well-designed system that allows public sector retirees to have dignity in retirement. We must work together to protect it."



Sub-chapter 72 President Barb Schwamberger testifies to Sterling City Council.

AFSCME retirees stand up for CGH workers

MORE THAN 50 AFSCME retirees and members attended a Sterling City Council meeting on July 16 to support CGH Medical Center employees trying to form a union with AFSCME (see page 7 for details).

During the meeting, workers at the city-owned hospital called on the council to intervene and require CGH's management to take a more neutral stance after CGH held numerous anti-union meetings and repeatedly sent out anti-union propaganda.

Their testimony was bolstered by the presence of supporters like Sub-chapter 72 President Barb Schwamberger, who was the last to speak.

"They are understaffed,"

Schwamberger said. "They have no one to speak for them because they have no union."

State contract keeps health care affordable for retirees

IN JUNE, COUNCIL 31 MEMBERS in state government overwhelmingly ratified their new contract.

"It was a long, hard fight to secure the contract," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "We battled for four years with former governor Bruce Rauner. But through it all state employees stood strong—and Chapter 31 retirees stood with them—and we won!"

AFSCME secured a court order that barred Rauner from imposing his harsh terms, effectively freezing

health care costs for retirees, along with active state and university employees, for the past five years. And in negotiations with the Pritzker administration, the AFSCME Bargaining Committee successfully kept health care affordable for everyone under the state plan.

The new contract includes the following health plan changes which impact SERS and SURS retirees:

- Retirees with 20 or more years of service will continue to receive premium-free coverage. Premiums for individuals with less than 20 years of service remain at 5% of the cost of coverage for every year of service less than 20.
- There will be no increase in the dependent premium contribution for Medicare-eligible retirees (TRAIL participants).
- The plans currently offered will continue to be offered.
- There will be no increase in dependent premium contributions until January 1, 2020 for non-Medicare eligible retirees. Non-Medicare retiree dependent premium contributions will increase by a composite of \$18/month for coverage each year beginning January 1, 2020.
- The monthly contribution for dental coverage will increase by \$1 per month for members and dependents in each of the last three years of the contract.
- There will be no cost increases related to plan design changes for the group insurance plans in the first year of the contract. In subsequent years, out-of-pocket costs will increase consistent with health care cost trends.



Giving back: For seven years, members of Retiree Sub-chapter 56 in Chester have collected canned goods for two different local food pantries to support community members in need.



Rebecca Cline

AFSCME Local 1765

YOUTH SERVICES COORDINATOR,
BELLEVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Tell us about your job at the Belleville Public Library.

I'm the youth services coordinator. I supervise three people in the department and we're in charge of library programming for children, from birth to age 21. We also do all the outreach for those ages, as well as special needs programming for children, youth and adults.

As the department head, I'm also in charge of collection development—ordering all the books that the children and youth are going to be reading. I keep busy!

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

I have the fun job at the library. I get to play. At three o'clock in the afternoon, someone else might be having a quiet day at their desk, but in the children's department I'm probably putting together puzzles. It's like being a kid again.

To be a successful youth services coordinator, you have to be able to play. You have to be willing to have fun and find programs that are fun for everyone else.

I've worked here since 2010. I started in circulation, moved to reference, then archives and I've been in my current position the last five years. Working with kids is a totally different challenge from everything else. You're constantly trying to find something that's going to grab their attention—a good book for story time will also have a game or a craft that goes with it. Then you've got to have something to get the older kids off their hand-held devices.

What's your favorite part of the job?

My favorite part of my job is being in charge of the collection.

I use a portion of my budget to order more books on social justice issues. I try to tie in the

work I do as president of our local union by ordering books on topics I think kids should know about, like labor history and equal rights.

One of my favorite recent additions is a fictional storybook about Mother Jones called *On Our Way to Turtle Bay: Mother Jones and Her March for Children's Rights*. I come from a coal mining family, so my dad wouldn't have it if we didn't know who John L. Lewis and Mother Jones were. I want to make sure the children here do too.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

We do a lot of outreach in the community. We reach out to schools, neighborhood associations, farmer's markets and street festivals. We take our programs to children who might not have means to get to the library. They might have financial or

“We fight to keep things fair for everybody. We stand together so everybody gets to eat, that's how this works.”

other hindrances to coming in our doors, so we bring the experience to them.

We've provided creative writing classes, crafts, STEM activities, and more. We've got an event coming up where we partner with local high schools to provide kids with school supplies they might not be able to afford on their own.

Finding something that finally resonates with a kid, that one topic, that one book that will keep them reading, instill a sense of belonging and teach them how to develop their interests, that's the biggest reward in my job.

How does the union improve your workplace?

We are really on top of making sure that everybody is treated fairly regarding pay, discipline and discrimination. We fight to keep things fair for everybody in this building. I'm ready to step in whenever necessary.

You just have to be one step ahead, even a small step ahead, and it makes a world of difference. You need to know what you're doing, go to the union trainings. I also take labor education classes over at U of I on the weekends to see if I can be better at what I do. Having just a little bit of knowledge makes a world of difference.

How has your union job impacted your family?

Not all the libraries around us are on our level. Quite a few only pay minimum wage and don't have benefits. There's a lot of turnover. Our union ensures that we're able to put in a good, hard day and have a decent wage so I can keep the lights and air conditioning on at my house and still be able to travel and have fun.

I can get time off to be with my kids so we can be together and so I can provide the things they need from me. They're both teenagers, they're in band and have weekend travel, and it's important that I can represent at the home front as well. Even though they're getting older, they still need support.

Why are you active in the union?

We're from Southern Illinois. My dad was with the United Mine Workers of America. So every job I've ever worked, if there was a union I made sure I was paying dues and contributing to the cause. And I tell my kids they better do the same.

We stand together so everybody gets to eat, that's how this works. I went to UMWA rallies; people were on strike not earning money for months at a time. They had a sense of family together. So of course I was going to be active in the union.

I don't know what I would do if I couldn't fight for everybody here. My dad just passed away and he was so proud that I'm president of this local. 