



ON THE MOVE



TAKING THE SHOT TO DEFEAT COVID

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

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

**FISCAL CRISIS
LOOMS** PAGE 3

**VACCINE BREAK-
THROUGH** PAGES 8-9

**PENSION
PROTECTION** PAGE 10

ON THE MOVE

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

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director
Mike Newman, Deputy Director
Neill McNamara, Editor
Tom Greensfelder, Designer
Cover: Mike Delgado, Local 473

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Vaccination makes conquering COVID possible

We can face down our fears



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

SUMMON THE COURAGE TO MOVE FORWARD

T*he only thing we have to fear is fear itself.* Those were the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as he urged Americans to come together to overcome the devastation wrought by the Great Depression, with an economy in tatters and millions unemployed.

The coronavirus pandemic we confront today may represent an even greater peril for our country than did the Depression of the 1930s. It has killed more Americans than were lost in all of World War II, left tens of thousands with lingering health complications and crippled our economy.

As we are once again called to unite to defend our nation—this time from a ferocious viral invader—the words of President Roosevelt point directly to what is again the greatest barrier to victory: fear itself.

Fear is, in fact, a natural human reaction. There are few among us with the unalloyed courage to rush headlong to meet every new challenge without a moment of hesitation. Most of us will waver, freeze or even flee when confronted with the novel or unfamiliar, whether it's merely as unsettling as first learning to swim or as risk-ridden as fighting in an armed conflict.

But all of human progress is about conquering our fears, summoning the courage to move forward for ourselves and for the greater good.

When the coronavirus first arrived in our midst, many union members were rightly afraid to do their jobs as rates of infection quickly soared. Our union immediately went to work to learn, educate and act in order to make workplaces safer and help members push through their fears.

We fought for the personal protective equipment needed to make our jobs safer, including surgical masks and gowns, face shields and gloves. As a result of our efforts, PPE became

commonplace in workplaces all across the state. Rates of infection began to fall and a “new normal” developed which allowed union members to report to work with a degree of confidence.

AFSCME also took up the battle in Washington, D.C. and all across the state of Illinois to expand sick-time benefits in light of the fact that COVID is so often a work-related illness and can require weeks to overcome. We were successful in passing federal legislation that established the right to paid sick leave in the event of COVID infection or exposure.

And we were able to negotiate special agreements with the state of Illinois as well as many local governments, universities, and nonprofit agencies to provide for additional time off beyond that guaranteed by federal law. In some instances, the union also succeeded in convincing employers to provide some form of “hazard” pay in recognition of the high-risk environment in which employees had to work, especially in the early days of the pandemic.

Now we are facing a new unknown, one that has prompted new fears even as it offers the promise of defending against the virus. COVID vaccinations are the most potent weapon we have in the battle to reduce the transmission of the coronavirus and begin to restore so much of what we value in our daily lives: Gatherings with friends and family, vacation travels, kids in their classrooms, high school sports with crowded bleachers, dinners at restaurants and drinks at bars, hugs freely given, and yes, kisses too.


Most fundamentally, it's the path to economic renewal and restoring jobs to those who have lost them.

Yet despite this immense social benefit, some frontline workers are refusing to be vaccinated, fearful of this new unknown. And as long as those fears prevail, we will remain vulnerable to this dangerous virus.

For many, especially younger people, COVID-19 is no more than a few days of mild to extreme discomfort—chills, weakness, fatigue. But for many others, it is something closer to agony—great difficulty in breathing, extreme weakness, brain fog. For some, it is weeks, even months, in the hospital, unable to visit with family, unable to breathe without oxygen, or unable to survive without being on a ventilator. And then, tragically, there are those for whom COVID-19 is a death sentence, often to a slow, painful and lonely death.

COVID cannot be defeated unless our fears can be overcome. Skepticism and concern are natural. But the fact is the vaccines have been proven safe and effective. Every study, every phase, every trial was reviewed by the FDA and a safety board of medical and scientific experts. And millions of our fellow Americans have already been vaccinated with only a handful of serious adverse reactions.

That's why our union is now working to ensure the safety of all members by educating every member about the very low risks and the very significant benefits—for ourselves and for our country—of being vaccinated against COVID. Time and again, those who came before us—be they great grandparents who crossed oceans, the early settlers on new frontiers, soldiers going into battle, civil rights activists fighting for human dignity, or workers who braved goons and guns to form the first unions—faced down their fears and moved our nation forward.

The question now before us is powerful and real: Can we do any less? 

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

Executive Director
Roberta Lynch

State Sector Executive Vice-President
Ralph Portwood, Local 1866

Private Sector Executive Vice-President
Yolanda Woods, Local 2481

Local Government Executive Vice-President
John Rayburn, Local 1215

Secretary
Dave Delrose, Local 1028

Treasurer
David Morris, Local 805

BOARD MEMBERS

State Conference Board Co-Chairs
Melanie Hoyle, Local 2600
Tim Worker, Local 993

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS

Phil Cisneros, Local 3969
Safiya Felters, Local 2854
Lloyd Marshall, Local 3477
Stephen Mittons, Local 2081
Kobie Robinson, Local 3835
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS

Terry Boone, Local 672
Garry Cacciapaglia, Local 1058
Tom Opolony, Local 89
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237
Carlene VanDyke, Local 2615
Miguel Vazquez, Local 3297

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS

Shaun Dawson, Local 2073
Jeffrey Reighter, II, Local 2856
Trudy Williams, Local 3433

REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS

Jerry Grammer, Local 1175
Tad Hawk, Local 1805
Cary Quick, Local 141

TRUSTEES

Cheryl Graham, Local 785
Tawny Proulx, Local 172
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693

RETIREE CHAPTER 31 REPRESENTATIVE

Larry Brown

Illinois faces fiscal crisis

New revenue needed to get state on solid financial ground

The state's precarious financial situation is the dark cloud hanging over the hopes of AFSCME members and countless others for this year's legislative session.

The dire revenue shortfall is the direct result of the defeat of the Fair Tax constitutional amendment at the polls in November. AFSCME went all-out to win passage of that amendment, which would have allowed the state to raise taxes only on the wealthy. Without the \$3 billion in anticipated Fair Tax revenue, Illinois has been left with a massive multi-billion-dollar budget deficit.

"For revenue, you go where the money is—the wealthiest taxpayers," said AFSCME Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. "But unlike most states in the country, our state can't do that without taxing all taxpayers. Because the Fair Tax was defeated, Illinois is constitutionally tied to the flat tax."

Fair Tax opponents helped create this crisis to lay the groundwork for an all-out attack on public employee pen-

Gov. Pritzker expressed similar concerns: "Because tax fairness was taken off the table there will be a real human impact here ... we cannot prevent these losses hitting real-life residents," he said. "I am continuing this conversation with leaders on both sides of the aisle to make up the rest of the deficit and bring long-term stability to our state's situation."

The governor proposes closing corporate tax loopholes, rolling back corporate tax breaks and decoupling Illinois tax law from federal law to prevent the loss of \$500 million in corporate tax revenue. These proposals will certainly help but won't solve the problem.

To bring more solutions to the table, the We Are One Illinois public employee union coalition has regrouped and is working on its own policy and communications strategy. We

"Because tax fairness was taken off the table there will be a real human impact here."

sions. Now instead of proposing new revenue on the scale needed to close the deficit, Republicans in the General Assembly are calling to "trim waste" and "tighten our belts," shorthand for cuts to public services, jobs and pension benefits.

Protect public services

AFSCME strongly disagrees with this unfair approach. The simple fact is a budget shortfall of \$3.9 billion can't be fixed by wage cuts and hiring freezes.

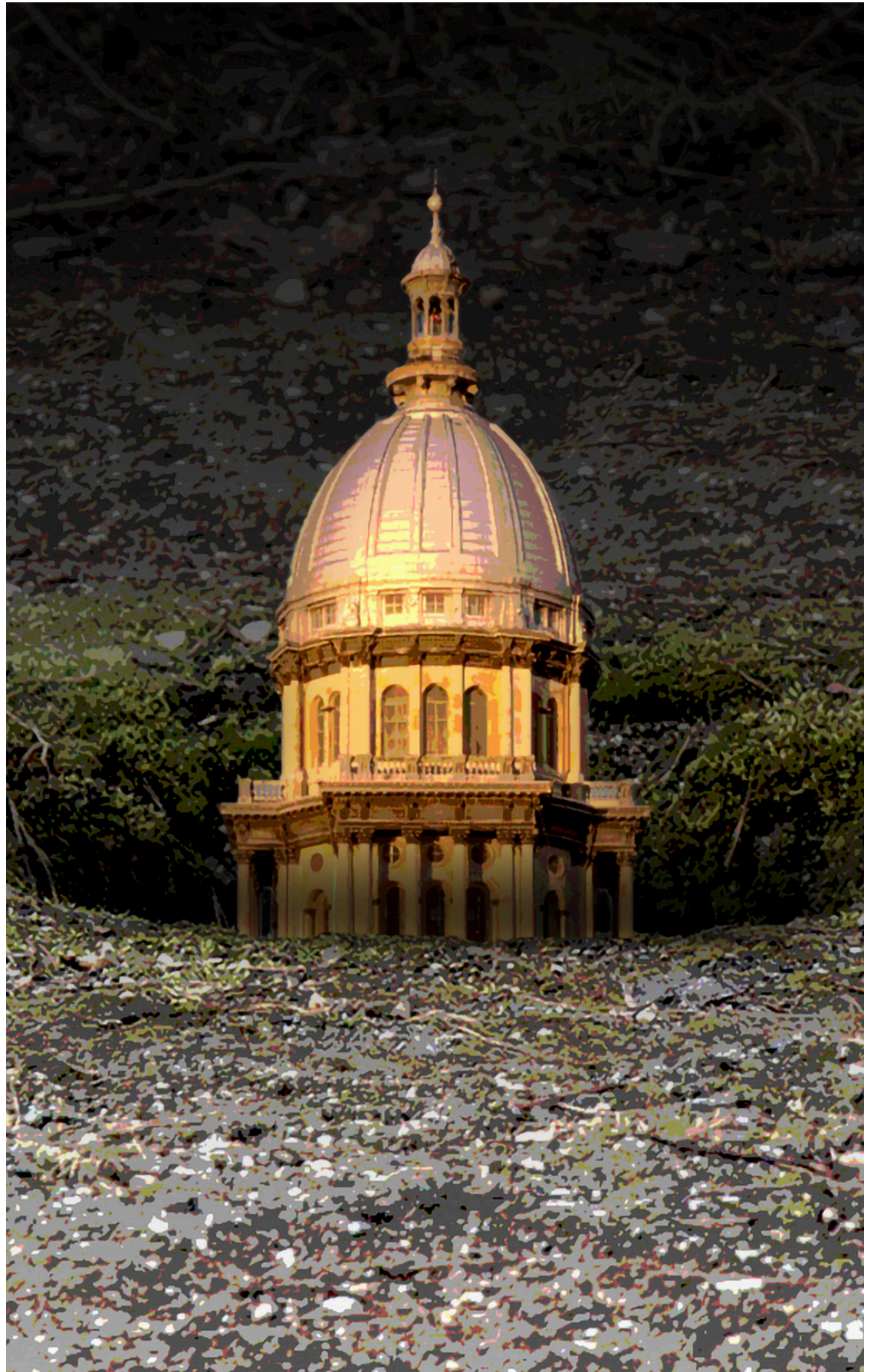
"Undoubtedly our state faces a severe fiscal crisis and action is urgently needed," Webb-Gauvin said. "However, it is grossly unjust to suggest that frontline state employees who have already sacrificed so much in our current public health crisis should bear an outsized share of the burden of fixing the state's fiscal crisis as well."

Are One Illinois was formed after unions found themselves unable to defeat the 2010 bill creating the lower Tier 2 pension benefit for newly hired employees. From that point on, the coalition was successful in beating back every effort to cut pension benefits, twice fighting all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court and winning.

Now there's a very real danger that pension opponents may try to place an amendment eliminating the state constitution's pension protection clause on the 2022 ballot.

Congress must act

AFSCME has also been helping lead the fight in Washington, D.C. for an urgently needed federal COVID relief package. Now that the measure is no longer being blocked by Republican former Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, newly



elected President Biden has a chance of passing his COVID-19 rescue package.

The \$1.9 trillion package includes funding for extended unemployment insurance, vaccine distribution, school reopening, public transit and an expansion of stimulus checks. And importantly, it also includes \$350 billion in unrestricted aid to state and local governments.

Unrestricted is the key phrase, Webb-Gauvin said.


"The relief packages thus far have been restricted to costs incurred directly by COVID response. But that's not

sufficient," she stressed. "Not all local governments have had access to the relief funds and a significant portion of the budget shortfalls are due to the loss of revenue because of COVID, but not directly tied to COVID response."

"Delivering direct, flexible aid to local governments across the country is an essential step to fueling our nation's economic recovery and will offer local officials and their communities the resources they need as they manage mounting costs and increasing demands on local government resources to protect their residents," the

National League of Cities said in a statement.

Local governments are often under statutory requirements to have balanced budgets. If they can't close the gap with revenue, service cuts and staff layoffs are inevitable.

"Call your congressional representative and urge them to make sure any COVID relief package includes unrestricted relief for state and local governments," Webb-Gauvin said. "Margins in the House are really tight, and all of Congress need to understand the importance of including this piece in the package." 



A new path forward for the nation

Two weeks after Capitol siege, Biden takes office, tackles challenges

After a decisive electoral victory, Joseph R. Biden was sworn in as President of the United States on Jan. 20, with Kamala D. Harris as Vice President. The inauguration was held in front of the U.S. Capitol, where just two weeks prior an angry mob stormed the building.

The siege on Jan. 6 threatened the lives of lawmakers and resulted in the death of five people, including a Capitol police officer beaten and killed by rioters. A second officer died by suicide in the aftermath of the ordeal.

AFSCME Council 31 issued a statement on that day: “We stand in solidarity with all Americans who reject the hatred, violence and lawlessness brought to the U.S. Capitol today. The will of the people won’t be denied by these desperate attempts to divide us.”

AFSCME members played a key role in restoring the Capitol and readying it for the inauguration. Members of AFSCME Local 626 (District Council 20) work at the U.S. Capitol as employees of the Architect of the Capitol. Not only did these workers live through the violence and destruction of that day, but when order was restored, they swiftly returned to their jobs, cleaning and repairing every corner of the Capitol complex.

In his inaugural address, President Biden made clear that he will work to represent all Americans and move the beleaguered nation toward a brighter future: “My whole soul is in this: Bringing America

together, uniting our people, uniting our nation,” he said.

“AFSCME members organized and mobilized in huge numbers to elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. We now look forward to being partners with

them in moving a bold pro-worker agenda,” said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. “They are committed to supporting our frontline heroes, investing in the public services that make our communities happen.”

Immediate progress

In his first days on the job, President Biden took swift executive action to protect and empower public service workers, strengthen public services and help all working people.


Biden’s first executive actions included:

- Boosting production of materials necessary to beat the COVID-19 pandemic, such as personal protective

equipment and vaccine vials;

- Strengthening the nation’s response to the coronavirus pandemic and making workplaces safer from COVID through stronger federal safety guidelines;
- Ordering the Justice Department to phase out its contracts with private prisons (see page 6);
- Restoring collective bargaining and worker protections that Donald Trump had stripped from public service workers in the federal government; and
- Promoting a \$15 minimum wage for employees of federal contractors.

“With these actions and others, President Biden is showing bold leadership, reminding us why elections matter,” Saunders said. “Now, it is time for Congress to follow this example by shoring up public services, delivering aid to our communities and taking additional steps to help working people survive this devastating pandemic.”

Congress will be more likely to move these measures forward with its new makeup. The morning of Jan. 6, the final election results came in the Georgia Senate runoff, where two Democratic challengers defeated incumbents, making an even split between parties in the U.S. Senate. Vice President Harris’ tie-breaking vote gave Democrats control, ensuring that Kentucky Republican Mitch McConnell—who for months blocked COVID relief legislation and aid to state and local governments—was replaced by new Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. 



A SECRETARY OF LABOR ON LABOR’S SIDE

President Biden has nominated Boston Mayor Marty Walsh for Labor Secretary. Walsh is an Irish immigrant who joined Laborers Union Local 223 when he was 21 and later became union president.

“Marty knows worker power means not just protecting the right to unionize but encouraging unionization and collective bargaining,” Biden said in his nomination remarks. “We will work closely on our shared agenda to increase worker power and protect the dignity of work for all working people.”

“Marty Walsh comes from the labor movement and will be a forceful advocate for working families,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said.

In his acceptance of the nomination, Walsh said: “We are facing hard times. But nobody’s tougher than the American worker. And now—now we have the opportunity to put power back into the hands of working people. And that is a good thing for our economy and our country.”

A new legislative session in an unprecedented year

State legislature limits activity in time of COVID

After meeting for barely a week during its spring session in 2020, the Illinois General Assembly searched to find a means to address the state's many pressing problems despite the cost and logistical difficulty of holding in-person meetings of both legislative bodies during the pandemic.

In February, they finally secured authorization to conduct committee work remotely. And legislators recently were approved for vaccinations during the current Phase 1b. That should pave the way for a more vigorous legislative schedule over the coming months.

and would have opened the door to weakening bargaining rights for every member.

Working with other unions in the Illinois AFL-CIO, AFSCME immediately mounted an intensive grassroots lobbying effort to educate legislators about the harm that would result if workers

problematic provisions from the bill before it was called for a final vote.

Legislative agenda

Whether or not the General Assembly is formally in session, the Council 31 lobbying team will be reaching out to legislators to press for support on a variety of measures of importance to AFSCME members, including: a "no-cuts" FY 22 state budget, summer unemployment insurance for school district and university employees, work-related presumption for COVID cases, wage-related funding for community disability agencies, reform of state labor law to speed up cases at the labor board, easing of FOID card requirements in IDOC, expanded rights for Gaming Board Special Agents and CNAs, and a number of bills initiated by the state AFL-CIO.

"No one really knows what this legislative session will look like or how much legislators will be able to tackle," AFSCME Council 31 Director of Legislative and Political Affairs Joanna Webb-Gauvin said. "But the more we can demonstrate grassroots support, the more likely our issues are to make it onto the agenda." 🐦

"No one really knows what this legislative session will look like."

In a "lame duck" session in January, legislators did act on several pending bills, including a package of criminal justice reform measures. Unfortunately, along with several provisions intended to improve equity and integrity in the criminal justice system, the bill also included language that would have drastically undermined union rights and legal protections for some AFSCME members in law enforcement

were stripped of their rights to bargain over working conditions or lost the qualified immunity that protects them from civil lawsuits for actions taken in the course of their employment.

In a matter of days, AFSCME and the AFL-CIO successfully conveyed to the bill's sponsors the dangerous precedents these measures would represent. The sponsors agreed to remove these

2021 ILLINOIS CONSOLIDATED ELECTION

On Tuesday, April 6, Illinois voters will select representatives for city councils, mayors, school boards, park boards and other local elected officials during the Illinois Consolidated Election. *On the Move* does not include endorsements for this general election because the paper went to print just days before the primary election on February 23.

Please visit AFSCME31.org/election for up-to-date information.



MADIGAN STEPS DOWN, REP. EMANUEL "CHRIS" WELCH ELECTED SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE



Michael J. Madigan stepped down as Speaker of the House of Representatives after nearly four decades of leadership. State Rep. Emanuel "Chris" Welch was elected as the new speaker on January 13.

Madigan was an essential ally during AFSCME's protracted battle with then-governor Bruce Rauner, who sought to eradicate public-sector unions in Illinois. As speaker, Madigan refused to



bow to Rauner's insistence that there would be no state budget unless Democrats in the General Assembly agreed to repeal collective bargaining rights for public employees. He stood firm and found ways to keep the state operating even as Rauner held the budget hostage to his demands.

When Rauner was defeated in 2018, Madigan worked with Governor Pritzker to pass the appropriations needed to fund the back wages owed to tens of thousands of state employees for the step increases Rauner had withheld.

"Speaker Madigan's role was invaluable in enabling the labor movement in Illinois to withstand Rauner's unrelenting attacks," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

Emanuel "Chris" Welch represents the

7th legislative district, which includes all or parts of Bellwood, Berkeley, Broadview, Forest Park, Hillside, LaGrange Park, Maywood, Melrose Park, Northlake, River Forest, Westchester and Western Springs. He is the first African-American to serve the state as Speaker of the House.

AFSCME has backed Rep. Welch in every election since he joined the Illinois General Assembly in 2013, welcoming him as guest speaker at union conferences because he knows the important role unions play in fostering social and economic justice.

"Unions ensure that workers are paid a fair and decent wage. They ensure that working conditions are safe. Unions were designed to protect the American worker," Welch said in a 2016 interview in *On the Move*.

"AFSCME congratulates Speaker Welch on his new role and looks forward to continuing to work with him," Lynch said.

Pension boards need union voices

AFSCME members make excellent trustees

Pension benefits are vital to the retirement security of public employees. Because of its charge to protect these benefits, the role of the board of trustees in the governance and management of public pension funds is critical.

Maintaining the strongest possible representation on pension fund boards is more crucial than ever as public employee pension benefits continue to be a lightning rod for attacks in public policy debates in Illinois. Trustees elected by fund participants (employees) and annuitants (retirees) are passionate advocates for pension fund beneficiaries; voting for these representatives is an important right.

That's why AFSCME Council 31 makes it a priority to

strengthen pension funds by working to elect union members as trustees who can serve as invaluable voices on pension fund boards.

In 2020, AFSCME voters made the difference in several pension fund elections:

- Re-elected AFSCME Local 3315 President Kevin Ochalla to the Cook County Pension Fund board of trustees.
- Re-elected SEIU member Verna Thompson to the Municipal Employees' Annuity and Benefit Fund

(MEABF) of Chicago.

- Elected AFSCME Local 268 Recording Secretary Tracie Mitchell and Chapter 31 Retiree Louis Kosiba to the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund.

Upcoming pension board elections

Participants and annuitants in the **State Universities Retirement System** will vote for trustees in an election held from April 1 to May 3, 2021.

AFSCME Council 31 is supporting long-time union activist Mitchell Vogel for re-election. Vogel is a retired professor at Northeastern Illinois University. He served as president of the University Professionals of Illinois Local


4100 of the American Federation of Teachers for more than 17 years and was vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers. Vogel's experience and expertise have served annuitants well in his 12 years as trustee, earning him the support of labor.

Participants and retirees of the **State Employees Retirement System** will vote for their representatives during the month of May. AFSCME Council 31 is supporting current annuitant trustee John Tilden for re-election and AFSCME Local 1964 President Jack Matthews to replace current trustee Shaun Dawson, president of Local 2073, who is not seeking re-election.

John Tilden was a state employee for 38 years and as a retiree helped organize sub-chapter 66, serving Lake and McHenry counties. He has

served as an executive board member of Chapter 31 retirees since 2008. Tilden was elected to the SERS board of trustees in 2016 and is seeking a second term.

Jack Matthews is a GIS Manager for the Illinois State Police in central Illinois and has served in state government for more than 20 years. Matthews seeks to build upon the work of past AFSCME trustees and maintain the fight to protect front-line workers' interests.

"The fight for a secure retirement is one in which all employees and retirees must engage," said Martha Merrill, AFSCME Council 31's director of research and employee benefits. "One key component in this fight is exercising your right to elect trustees that represent your interests in your pension fund. Your vote is your voice." 

Your voice on pension boards

"When we have a seat at the table of our pension boards, our voice speaks to protect and preserve our pensions now and for the future. It is vitally important that we all vote for the union endorsed candidate when we receive our pension trustee ballots. If we allow management to fill the seats at the pension board tables, we will not have a voice in our retirement."

AFSCME LOCAL 3433 PRESIDENT TRUDY WILLIAMS, FORMER IMRF TRUSTEE



"Not only is it important for you to vote in your pension fund elections to ensure that a pro-labor voice is on the board, but it's also equally important that a union candidate runs in that election. A pension is a benefit—a deferred payment promised to you after you retire to ensure your financial stability. It's up to us to protect that benefit."

AFSCME LOCAL 3315 PRESIDENT KEVIN OCHALLA, COOK COUNTY PENSION FUND TRUSTEE



"State employees enjoy the right, after years of qualified service and contributions, to a state-supported pension. And they have an active role in how the state administers and invests the money paid into the system via representatives on the board of trustees. I am honored to be one of four active state employees serving as trustees to protect the contributions and interests of our AFSCME sisters and brothers."

AFSCME LOCAL 2081 PRESIDENT STEPHEN MITTONS, SERS TRUSTEE



"The SERS Board of Trustees is charged with oversight and governance of the State Employees Retirement System and it has been a privilege to serve state employees and retirees for the past five years. I am running for this position again because AFSCME needs active voting membership on the board to ensure that the pension system remains healthy into the future."

AFSCME CHAPTER 31 RETIREE JOHN TILDEN, SERS TRUSTEE



"Whether you participate in IMRF or another Illinois public pension fund, it is *your* pension fund—investing your dollars; making decisions about your benefits; affecting your financial security and the financial security of your family. You have the right and opportunity to vote for your representative. As a trustee, my voice as a union retiree will be instrumental in achieving fair and effective decisions."

AFSCME CHAPTER 31 RETIREE LOUIS KOSIBA, IMRF TRUSTEE



AFSCME opposes prison closures, urges investment in rehabilitation

On Dec. 15, Governor JB Pritzker announced a number of proposed cuts to state programs—possibly including prison closures. These measures were aimed at addressing the state’s dire budget shortfall resulting from the defeat of the Fair Tax constitutional amendment in the November election.

Proponents of closures point to the significant reduction in the state’s prison population in recent years, but fail to take into account that for more than

Chances: The Case for Investing in Corrections Education, a new report by AFSCME Council 31, underscores this reality: While research demonstrates that

“AFSCME will continue to oppose shuttering state prisons, urging a rational approach.”

a decade our correctional facilities have been significantly overcrowded, consistently failing to meet American Correctional Association safety standards.

Nor do they consider that more intensive programming—often imposed by court order—requires more specialized supervision.

What’s more, “to initiate prison closures in the midst of a pandemic that has sickened thousands of correctional employees and offenders and is clearly accelerated by crowded conditions would be the height of irresponsibility,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said.

“AFSCME will continue to oppose shuttering state prisons,” she said, “urging instead a progressive and rational approach to restructuring correctional housing and programming to ensure safe, secure and rehabilitative conditions in IDOC.”

Educating, training needed

AFSCME argues that those genuinely concerned with a secure and rehabilitative prison system should recognize that the best hope of reducing recidivism is to offer more robust educational and job-training opportunities within it. There are now long waits for both academic and vocational education programs, and many facilities do not offer comprehensive programming.

Safer Communities, Second

education and training opportunities reduce recidivism, Illinois has underfunded these programs for decades.

Failure to invest in these programs returns formerly incarcerated individuals to the community ill-equipped and unprepared for reintegration. Conversely, the AFSCME report points out, “education programs could minimize the financial and social costs of crime,

strengthen families and communities, and fulfill the state’s obligation to not just incarcerate, but also to rehabilitate.”

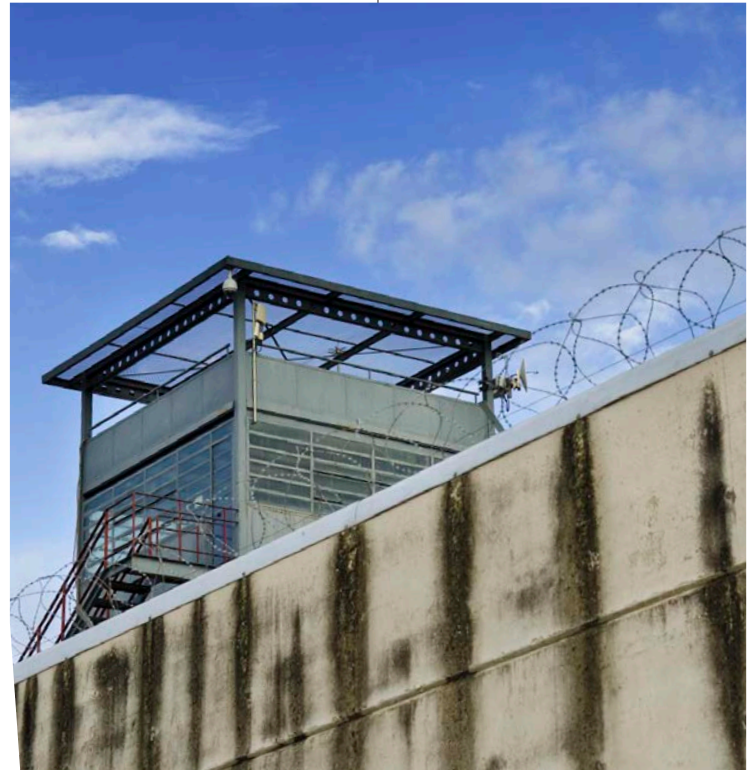
More than token gestures

In October 2020, Governor JB Pritzker unveiled a set of seven principles designed to guide the state towards a more equitable criminal justice system that would “prioritize rehabilitation over punishment” and “offer more opportunities for rehabilitation” while in prison.

“To translate these principles into practice, IDOC must take a comprehensive look at how it carries out its educational mission, and Illinois policymakers must make the modest, but critical investment needed to ensure education and training opportunities to the men and women in Illinois’ correctional facilities,” the report states.

To address the long-standing neglect of prison education and expand opportunities, AFSCME recommendations include:

- **Eliminate waiting lists** by adding enough educators and vocational instructors to meet the need (and ensure that compensation for these positions is competitive with



the market rate).

- **Prioritize hiring administrative support staff and program administrators** to provide the support instructors need to focus on high-quality instruction.
- **Conduct a comprehensive assessment of facilities** to identify potential expansion of classroom and training space through renovation or conversion.
- **Work with Lakeland College, IDOC’s primary partner, and other community**

colleges across the state, to expand the number and array of programs offered at each facility and address colleges’ concerns about delayed reimbursement.

In the report’s conclusion, AFSCME calls for implementation of real reform, which “requires resources, attention, and a comprehensive plan, developed with input from those working on the front lines of Illinois correctional facilities.”

BIDEN DIRECTS DOJ TO END CONTRACTS WITH PRIVATE PRISONS

Since the rise of private correctional vendors and the privatization of state prisons began in the 1980s, AFSCME members across the country have repeatedly raised their union voice in opposition to an immoral, for-profit industry marked by low wages and inadequate training for staff and poor living conditions for inmates.

AFSCME Council 31 took up this fight from its earliest days and in 1990 won passage of groundbreaking state legislation to bar privatization and outlaw private prisons in Illinois—the first such measure in the United States.

Private prisons are more dangerous for staff and inmates than publicly run facilities. According to a 2016 U.S. Department of Justice study of federal prisons, violent attacks by inmates on correctional staff were 163% higher in private than public prisons, and inmate-on-inmate assaults nearly 30% higher.

Being part of a strong union means higher wages and better benefits, but it also means the ability to advocate for improvements in the workplace,

including adequate staffing levels, better safety equipment and more control over working hours.

So it’s no surprise that public prisons are safer than their private counterparts in states where correctional staff have a strong voice on the job, and that correctional officers in public prisons earn an average of 20% higher wages than their private sector counterparts.

Recognizing these realities, on Jan. 26, President Joe Biden ordered the federal Department of Justice to end the use of privately-run prisons, directing the attorney general not to renew Justice Department contracts with privately operated criminal detention facilities. More than 14,000 federal inmates are currently housed at privately managed facilities.

“This is a first step to stop corporations from profiting off of incarceration,” Biden said, whose order is a continuation of the policy enacted when he was Vice President in the Obama Administration. It had been overturned during the Trump years.

THE WAY BACK TO NORMAL:

WE'RE GETTING VACCINATED!



The arrival of safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 give us hope that together we can end the pandemic and return to normalcy in our daily lives.

AFSCME members who work in health care and long-term care settings were designated part of Group 1a—the first to receive the vaccine—and many have already received their first or even second doses.

Many more AFSCME members will soon have the same opportunity, whether in your workplace, a public health agency in your area, through your doctor or at a pharmacy.

Be sure to sign up when it's your turn. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself, your family and your community.

VAX FACTS

Two vaccines have been approved for use by the US Food and Drug Administration. They are from Pfizer and Moderna, two leading pharmaceutical companies. Each has been proven more than 95% effective at preventing COVID-19. Here are more basic facts.

Getting vaccinated can prevent getting sick with COVID-19.

The individual impact of COVID-19 varies, from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. There is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you, even if you do not have underlying health conditions that put you at increased risk of severe complications. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are a safe and effective way to protect yourself from getting sick with COVID-19.

You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Neither of the authorized vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccines contain mRNA which works with the body's natural defenses to safely develop an immune response to the disease. When vaccinated, you will not test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.

The vaccines are proven to be safe.

The vaccines were tested in clinical trials involving more than 70,000 people combined to make sure they meet safety and efficacy standards and protect adults of different ages, races and ethnicities. These clinical trials were conducted according to rigorous standards set forth by the FDA.



"I got my immunization to help stop the spread of COVID. Too many lives have been lost and affected because of this disease. I'm doing this for myself, my loved ones and you."

NATALIE STANLEY
VETERANS NURSE ASSISTANT CERTIFIED,
ANNA VETERANS HOME
AFSCME LOCAL 3280



"Got my first dose of COVID vaccine and I felt great, no tenderness or anything. Getting vaccinated protects my co-workers and the individuals we serve and I'm proud to do it!"

ART TURNER
RESIDENTIAL SERVICE PROVIDER II,
MILESTONE INC.
AFSCME LOCAL 2515



"I took the vaccine for my safety, my co-workers and residents and for my parents."

KENA PETERSON
HOUSEKEEPER/LAUNDRY AIDE,
SMITH VILLAGE SENIOR COMMUNITY
AFSCME LOCAL 919



"I'm thrilled I was able to receive the COVID vaccine. I can now contribute to making my family and community a little safer. And as someone who dislikes needles in a big way, this vaccine was a piece of cake!"

AMY TURENNE
FORENSIC TOXICOLOGIST,
LAKE COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE



MEDICAL EXPERT ANSWERS COMMON QUESTIONS

In a virtual town hall meeting presented by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Dr. Emily Landon—an infectious disease specialist at the University of Chicago—answered many of the most commonly asked questions about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Q: Trials showed no serious adverse effects—only minor side effects. What’s the difference?

DR. LANDON: There’s a big difference between serious adverse effects and side effects. Serious adverse effects that the vaccine is not intended to create, there were none for either the Moderna or the Pfizer vaccines. There just weren’t any problems.

Side effects—maybe feeling pretty nasty after the second dose—are not a bad reaction to the vaccine. Those symptoms are the actual effect of your immune system being pushed to do a training exercise. It’s like if you’re training for a marathon, you’re going to get sore muscles. If you’re training your immune system to fight off COVID, you’re going to get some soreness in your arm, maybe some fatigue or chills. But we’re talking about 12 to 24 hours of not feeling your best as an investment in training your immune system to fight off COVID.

Q: Should I get the vaccine if I’m pregnant or plan to be?

DR. LANDON: There’s no connection between this vaccine and infertility. For pregnancy, I think that’s somewhat of an individual decision. I’ve met with a lot of pediatricians and obstetricians-gynecologists and they all said for frontline workers the risk of COVID is much greater to your baby and to you than the risk of the vaccine. So I think if you’re pregnant, you should talk to your obstetrician about what the risk is to you and what the benefit is. We are encouraging our pregnant people to get vaccinated at the University of Chicago.

Q: What about for people with allergies, such as to the flu shot?

DR. LANDON: I am allergic to a million things, and I had a heart-to-heart with my expert allergist. She said, ‘No worries, Emily, you should get this vaccine.’ She deals with patients who’ve had allergic reactions to vaccines in the past and says we routinely give vaccines to patients in the clinic where we’re able to rescue them if they have a bad reaction. So if you’ve had a problem in the past, talk to your doctor and have an allergist work with you to have the vaccine taken care of. But not being able to take a flu shot in the past is not a reason to not take this. These vaccines are completely different.

Q: I had COVID-19. Do I still need the vaccine?

DR. LANDON: Yes. If you had COVID, your immunity wanes over time and it’s not easily predictable when, so it’s a strong recommendation that you get vaccinated. I recommend that you go out and get the vaccine, but wait 90 days after your infection with COVID so that you are not using a dose during the time when we know you’re immune.

You can watch excerpts of Dr. Landon’s answers along with her entire hour-long presentation on [AFSCME31.org](https://www.afscme31.org) and the AFSCME Council 31 YouTube channel.



“I got the vaccine for many reasons, but most important are my three grandchildren born last year that I haven’t seen in person yet.”

DANNY WILLIAMS
MENTAL HEALTH TECHNICIAN IV,
SHAPIRO DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER
AFSCME LOCAL 29



“I was vaccinated to help stop the spread of the coronavirus and protect the people around me.”

MARY CRAWFORD
REGISTERED NURSE,
PINCKNEYVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER
(WEXFORD)
AFSCME LOCAL 943



“I want to do my part to put this pandemic behind us.”

ADAM CORRELL
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER,
ROBINSON CORRECTIONAL CENTER
AFSCME LOCAL 3649



“Getting vaccinated is the way for frontline employees to defend ourselves against this virus.”

RALPH PORTWOOD
CORRECTIONS CLERK II,
STATEVILLE CORRECTIONAL CENTER
AFSCME LOCAL 1866

SHORT REPORTS



AFSCME welcomed 164 new members—adult and juvenile probation officers and counselors—from the 19th Circuit Court Judge in Lake County.

Probation employees join AFSCME

DESPITE ALL THE CHALLENGES facing workers who want to join a union during the pandemic, the ranks of new AFSCME members are growing. On February 1, 164 employees of the 19th Circuit Chief Judge won certification of their union.

“These Lake County adult and juvenile probation officers and counselors saw firsthand how AFSCME representation made a difference,” Council 31 Associate Director Tracey Abman said. “When the county attempted to reduce benefits, the Lake County employees we already represented were protected. That victory helped inspire these workers to join our union.”

The probation and counseling employees had to withstand an intense anti-union campaign conducted by the probation department

administration in order to become members. They join hundreds of other probation employees in AFSCME’s ranks.

Chicago Public Library employees advocate for safety

WHILE MANY LIBRARIES IN Illinois and around the country closed their facilities—instead relying on contactless services due to COVID concerns—Chicago Public Library branches have been open to patrons since the summer.

The city library system never tried curbside pick-up. But it did reduce custodial and security staff, leaving library employees represented by AFSCME Local 1215 to disinfect computers and enforce mask-wearing.

“We’ve been open to the public since June and we’ve

been fighting for almost a year to stop the spread of COVID with adequate PPE, curbside pick-up, limiting time a patron can be in the library and more,” said President John Rayburn. “Now we’re fighting for our members to be able to get vaccinated and continue to have the safety we need until we beat this virus.”

Rayburn said he and his fellow union members recognize the critical role public libraries play in the city, especially in the cold weather months when the libraries serve as warming centers for the homeless.

“Our members feel the need to be there because people don’t have anywhere else to go,” Rayburn said. “People have a need for computers to file unemployment or do their taxes. We’re making sure the public’s needs are being met. Library management should ensure that we are protected from COVID in that process.”

Mayor Lori Lightfoot has often referred to the essential

nature of the city’s public library system during the pandemic. Rayburn said Local 1215 members believe that the risks they face daily should ensure their inclusion in the 1b phase of Chicago’s vaccination program.

“The mayor uses that word ‘essential’ saying we shouldn’t close, yet she says we’re not essential enough to be in the 1b group? To me that’s contradicting yourself,” Rayburn said.

A majority of Chicago City Council members agree. At the request of AFSCME Council 31, 35 aldermen added their names to a letter to Mayor Lightfoot urging her to include library employees in the 1b group.

“We are writing you now to urge that CDPH immediately act to ensure that all CPL employees are included in Phase 1b and recognized as ‘essential frontline’ employees for purposes of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine,” the letter stated. “CPL employees have been on the front lines

for many months now, risking their health and that of their families, to serve our communities. They deserve the recognition and respect that vaccination priority would provide.”

Vaccine brings hope to Illinois veterans’ homes

THE COVID VACCINE HAS come to Illinois’ veterans’ homes and with it, hope for the safety of veterans residing there.

Over the past two months, a great majority of veterans have been vaccinated. As a result, there have been no new deaths in weeks in the state’s veterans’ homes as *On the Move* went to press.

On Jan. 11, Gov. Pritzker announced that the director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Linda Chapa LaVia, was stepping down. The change marked the end of a tragic year for the homes as COVID-19 outbreaks took the lives of nearly 100 veterans.

Pritzker said the state will undertake a national search for a new head of the department. Major General Peter Nezamis of the Illinois National Guard is serving as interim director.

Supreme Court denies Janus

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT announced on Jan. 25 that it won’t hear a bloc of cases that sought to financially kneecap unions for obeying the law.

The plaintiffs in these cases—one of whom was Mark Janus—were attempting to recoup fair share fees collected from non-members prior to the Supreme Court’s ban on such fees in its 2018’s *Janus v. AFSCME* ruling.

Noting that labor unions had collected such fees for decades consistent with a 1970’s Supreme Court ruling (*Abood*) finding them to be constitutional, lower courts have uniformly rejected Janus and company’s attempt at legal extortion.

“A federal appeals court explained in one of these cases, ‘the Rule of Law requires that parties abide by, and be able to rely on, what the law is,’ not what the law may become in the future,” a Vox Media story said.



Mark Janus and Bruce Rauner on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court after it banned union fair share fees in 2018.

The second case brought by Janus, “and the several related cases that the Supreme Court announced it would not hear, all involved agency fees that public-sector unions collected prior to the decision in Janus I. Thus, when the unions collected these fees, *Abood* was still good law, and the unions were acting entirely lawfully,” Vox reported.

“The Court’s action in the anti-union cases suggests that the Supreme Court will not disturb the dominant view among the lower courts, and that unions can heave a sigh of relief for the time being.”

But as unions know all too well, there are no guarantees when it comes to the unrelenting attacks from anti-union forces.

In fact, Vox writes, “there is still at least one more case pending before the justices that presents the question of whether Janus I applies retroactively (the Court likely took no action on that case because additional briefing in that case is not due until late February).”

Judge rejects management objections to CGH union

NEARLY 1,000 EMPLOYEES of CGH Medical Center in Sterling took a big step toward realizing their goal of forming a union with AFSCME in January when an administrative

law judge of the state labor board issued a decision rejecting objections raised by CGH management.

Hospital employees organized their union to have a voice to advocate for their patients and a seat at the table when important decisions are made that affect their working lives. The soon-to-be union members at the hospital include registered nurses, certified nurse assistants, licensed practical nurses, phlebotomists, medical assistants and other health care workers.

“I voted to form a union

at CGH to ensure fair pay, fair treatment and a guaranteed voice in caring for our patients,” registered nurse Manuel Mooney said.

Management has been trying to frustrate the will of employees to form a union for more than a year, waging an aggressive anti-union campaign among the workers before they filed for their union. And after they filed, management threw up as many legal roadblocks as possible to discourage and deny these employees their right to representation.

“I am proud that we stood

together, unified, to form our union,” registered nurse Jodi Thompson said. “At the end of the day, we want to make CGH stronger, to serve our community the best way we know how: through care and compassion.”

Union activists at CGH have demonstrated great courage and determination despite all the employer’s obstacles. They signed up their co-workers, spoke out publicly, and provided compelling testimony time and again.

“CGH management should recognize the will of their employees and begin to forge a good working relationship with our union, not waste more time and money on an appeal,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “Our union is proud to help give CGH employees the voice and the respect they truly deserve.”

Study recommends wage boost for DSPs

A NEW STUDY COMMISSIONED by the state of Illinois shows that wages and benefits for Direct Service Personnel (DSP) in state-supported, community-based disability agencies must be significantly increased in Illinois to ensure the state is in compliance with a court order. Further, the study holds

that DSP wages should remain at 1.5 times the minimum wage for providers to remain competitive in hiring and retaining core direct care staff.

Since 2011, Illinois has been subject to the Ligas Consent Decree, which is a direct result of a lawsuit filed in 2005 on behalf of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want community-based services and supports.

The state was found out of compliance with the decree in 2018 and began a comprehensive process to ensure its compliance—which includes increasing reimbursement rates to agencies that provide community-based care.

Thousands of AFSCME members who work in these community-based settings are paid very low wages. Together as a union they have steadily won increased state funding for their agencies for wages.

Implementation of the study’s recommendations will require significant ongoing investment from the state (more than \$140 million in additional FY22 funding alone)—an investment that AFSCME has urged for years.

But that won’t be easy.

“Given the State’s ongoing economic and fiscal challenges, implementation may be challenging and not on the timeline or of the immediate scope reflected in the study,” the state Department of Human Services said in a Dec. 8 letter.



CGH Medical Center employees organized a union with AFSCME to advocate for themselves and their patients.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME MEMBERS FACE THE STORM

Illinois, along with much of the country, was hit with a huge snowstorm in late January—and again in February. More than a foot of snow fell in some areas, but AFSCME members like these Local 1058 members at the city of Rockford kept the streets clear for safe passage.

First-time bargaining committee member Linda Green said the biggest accomplishment was getting management “to hear us out and understand the type of work we do.” Although the committee wasn’t able to get everything they wanted, she said, they made important progress.

The four-year agreement includes on-call pay, extra pay for picking up shifts, an annual retention bonus and 3% annual wage increases.

Without union representation, employees at Broadstep Academy would have lower starting wages that wouldn’t provide for them or their families, Green said. Management proposed taking away many of the gains made in the previous contract, but “we were able to negotiate with them and stop it. We were not backing down.”

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner and included Green, Chad Kuhlow, Andy Miller, Melissa Walsh, Gloria Enenbach, Judy Cunningham, Samantha Cuzimano, Amy King and Marshay Booker.



AFSCME Local 1277 members Cindy Harrelson, Dana Oltmanns, Melody Mileham and Lewis Allison celebrate ratification of new union contract with Logan County Health Department.

Better contract for busy Logan County Health Dept. employees

MEMBERS OF THE SMALL BUT mighty AFSCME Local 1277 are working hard doing contact tracing and overseeing distribution of the COVID vaccine in Logan County. But they also made time to negotiate a new two-year contract that includes raises and eliminates unfair furlough language.

The 100% union local representing nurses, maintenance and clerical workers and support staff has been working in all-hands-on-deck mode during the pandemic with clerical workers stepping up to do contact tracing alongside RNs on the weekends.

Despite their heavy workload, the employees have had to endure furloughs as a result of the Rauner era when Logan County had trouble keeping its doors open without state funding. The bargaining committee successfully removed the

problematic furlough language from the contract. They also secured a one-dollar across-the-board wage raise, which amounts to between 3% and 9.5% increases, and an additional 2% raise in the second year.

The bargaining committee included Local President Lewis Allison and Vice President Dana Oltmanns and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Christina DeAngelo.

Oltmanns is a registered nurse and the lead on WIC programming for the department.

She’s proud that this contract secures the right for employees to use sick and benefit time to care for foster children.

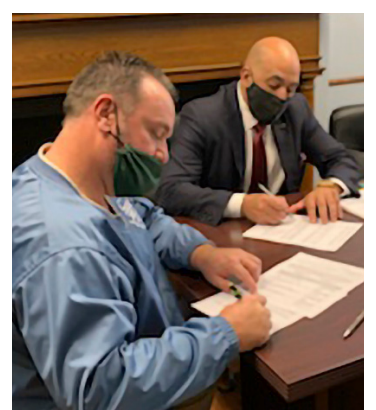
The team was also pleased that management was willing to work with the union to raise wages ahead of the scheduled increase in the state’s minimum wage, preventing wage compression.

“The union helps force discussion between administration and staff so both sides will work together better and that’s how we were able to accomplish what we did,” Oltmanns said.

New management, new contract at Broadstep

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 2399 in Freeport won their second collective bargaining agreement, but the first with Broadstep Academy. The local’s previous contract was with Willowglen Academy, before the school recently changed hands to holding company Bain Capital.

The bargaining unit of 87 employees includes paraprofessionals, counselors, teachers, nurses, and qualified intellectual disabilities professionals.



AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Jeremy Noelle and Jackson County State’s Attorney Joseph A. Cervantez sign agreement for new Local 2664 members.

Jackson County State’s Attorney employees join AFSCME

AFSCME LOCAL 2664 IN Jackson County welcomed 10 new members from the state’s attorney’s office.

After the incumbent Democratic state’s attorney was voted out, Joseph A. Cervantez, a Republican, took office. Although they hoped he would run a fair office, employees wanted to have more certainty, so they decided to join AFSCME.

But just as AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Jeremy Noelle was about to turn signed cards into the labor



Vienna High School Student Council members accept a donation from AFSCME members in honor of local teens tragically killed in an October car accident.

board, Cervantez reached out to AFSCME. A former Laborer's Union member, he offered to voluntarily recognize the new union members as one of his first orders of business.

Cervantez also agreed to fold the new members into the existing Local 2664 collective bargaining agreement for the courthouse employees. He also worked with the union on a Christmas gift program for children.

"It was really refreshing for the incoming Republican officeholder to initiate the voluntary recognition after the former officeholder refused," Noelle said. "AFSCME doesn't rely on party labels. We will work with anyone if they do the right thing for employees."

Shawnee, Vienna correctional centers come together after tragic accident

LAST OCTOBER, SIX TEENAGERS riding together crashed into a tree in Ozark, Illinois. Four of the teenagers died as a result of their injuries.

The tight-knit community in Johnson County was left reeling. Families and co-workers gathered for prayer vigils and fundraisers to support the families whose children were involved. One was the son of an AFSCME member.

To provide assistance in this time of grief, AFSCME members at Vienna (Local 415) and Shawnee (Local 3605)

Correctional Centers pooled their resources. Local 415 raised \$6,000 for the families of the four children who died and Local 3605 contributed an additional \$3,000. The Vienna High School Student Council gratefully accepted the heartfelt donation on behalf of the affected families.

Women take lead in Rockford region

ROCKFORD UNITED LABOR (RUL) is led by a woman for the first time in its history. AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner was elected to serve a two-year term as president. A Rockford native, Dorner previously served as vice president.

Joining her on the RUL executive board is AFSCME Local 692 Vice President Sandra Patlan, the first Latina woman elected to a leadership position at RUL. She's a paraprofessional at Rockford Public Schools and will chair the RUL Community Services Committee. Along with new trustee Christina Magee, this is the largest cohort of women ever elected to the organization's executive board in its 66-year history.

The RUL is one of 500 national central labor committees of the AFL-CIO, comprised of almost all labor unions in the greater Rockford area. It represents more than 22,000 union members in the region.

"Being part of this union is like a big door opening,"

Patlan said, "not just for me but for others that can't speak for themselves, whether it's in the workplace or in the community."

Maryville employees negotiate gains

AFSCME LOCAL 55 MEMBERS ratified their third union collective bargaining agreement with

Maryville Academy, a northern Illinois nonprofit services agency for at-risk children and families.

"I'm privileged and happy to be of service here," said Martha Stroger, a youth care specialist who has been at the academy since 1993. "I'm grateful to be able to have conversations with these young girls. I can't save the world but if one little girl gets something out of what I say, it means so much to me."

Stroger said she and her

co-workers keep the young women and families they serve at the top of their bargaining priorities. But they also work to ensure fair working conditions and good wages and benefits for themselves.

"We got raises, more paid sick time, and reduced insurance premiums," she said. "We did a good job, and we will continue to work so that on our next contract we'll get a little more."

Stroger was very pleased that the local was able to have Martin Luther King's birthday included as a holiday.

Stroger said all employees have worked hard to keep COVID out of the agency, wearing PPE and taking precautions in their personal lives so they don't bring anything into the facility. She said the teenagers they help are anxious for life to go back to normal, but the staff works hard to educate them on appropriate protective measures.

"I work with some wonderful women," Stroger said. "We work diligently together to keep everyone safe."

In addition to Stroger, the Local 55 Bargaining Committee included Dorothy Smith, Theadora Pride, Delondria McDonald, Pam Bridges and Antoinette Pleasant, and was led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.



AFSCME STRONG IN COOK COUNTY

Negotiations are underway for more than 5,000 AFSCME members in Cook County government, including these members of Locals 2226 and 3692. On February 10, they held a virtual Green Day to show support for their bargaining committee.

AFSCME members in nursing homes welcome vaccine



AFSCME members are working to stop the spread of COVID in Illinois nursing homes, like River Bluff Nursing Home in Rockford.

“Every day that a dose of vaccine is not in somebody’s arm is a day that person is exposed to COVID,” said Hani Mahmassani, at the National Science Foundation. “It’s a matter of life and death, and every day counts in this fight.”

That statement is never truer than in nursing homes, where residents are compromised by their health, age and close proximity to one another. In this harrowing situation, there is a real union

difference: Union members have been saving lives throughout the pandemic. A report in the Health Affairs Journal found that the rate of COVID-related deaths in unionized nursing homes

was 30% lower than in nursing homes without union representation.

“Unions were also associated with greater access to PPE [and] ... implementing infection control policies that protect vulnerable nursing home residents,” the report states.

AFSCME members who have worked to stop the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities—putting resident and employee safety first—are now urging their fellow union members to take the next step and get vaccinated.



AFSCME members in nursing homes, like Local 2452 President Nicole Thomas, breathed a “sigh of relief” after residents and staff received the vaccine.

Nicole Thomas
AFSCME LOCAL 2452
THRIVE NURSING HOME

After nearly a year of living in fear during the pandemic, worrying for her family and for the residents, CNA and Local 2452 President Nicole Thomas was ready for the COVID-19 vaccine to arrive at Thrive Nursing Home in Lake County.

“We didn’t have too many infections among residents and employees in the first several months of the pandemic, but in December, so many employees got infected that I was scared for my life,” Thomas said.

While many employees and residents tested positive, most of the residents and all of the employees recovered, Thomas said. She knows that the hard work of employees made the difference.

“We worked tirelessly to protect them,” she said. “When I see the residents walking around, I can actually be happy that they are living another day and they don’t have to die by this terrible disease. It gives me overwhelming joy to see that they made it through.”

That hope and joy is what

inspired Thomas and her co-workers to work with Thrive to ensure they got the doses they needed.

“When we got our first shots it was a sigh of relief,” she said. “At least 80% of employees got the vaccine and nearly every resident. Because infection rates are down, we’re back open for dining and activities. We don’t have any infections right now. The vaccine is working, and it brings joy to my heart. It gives us freedom to live our life again and not be living in fear.”

Linda Mays
AFSCME LOCAL 473
RIVER BLUFF
NURSING HOME

“I’ve seen 11 residents die from COVID and it’s so hard,” said CNA and Local 473 member Linda Mays who works at River Bluff Nursing Home in Winnebago County. “They’re close personal friends, they’re family. It doesn’t matter the color. We try to fill in for their family.”

Mays understands what it’s like to entrust your loved ones to someone else’s care.

“My dad is the reason why I got into this work. The people who cared for him at the end, they did an excellent job,” she said. “This job is hard, but you’ve got core people who take this personally and they work here because they have compassion and love for these people.”

“We worked tirelessly to protect them.”

Mays said like so many others, she did have concerns about the vaccine. It seemed like it was produced too quickly. And the history of medical experiments with Black Americans makes it difficult to trust. But she said she decided to have faith.

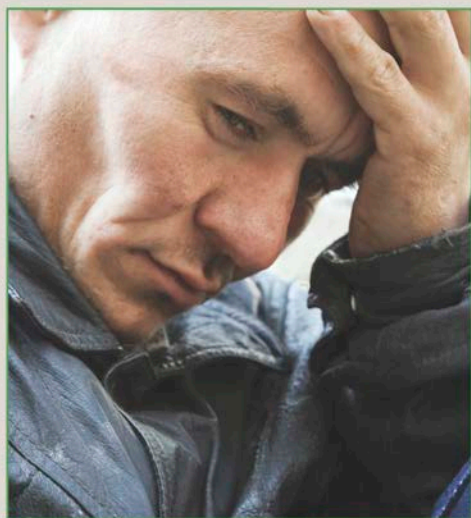
“Times are scary. Everybody is scared. But at the end of the day, I can’t let my fears interfere,” Mays said. And her co-workers share her determination. Nearly 90% of them have been vaccinated.

“We all said, we have got to do this. Getting vaccinated is more about them than us. If we’re protected, they’re protected. Maintenance, house-keeping, aides, nurses, we all had our sleeves rolled up for that second vaccination.”

Worried? Overwhelmed? PSP can help!

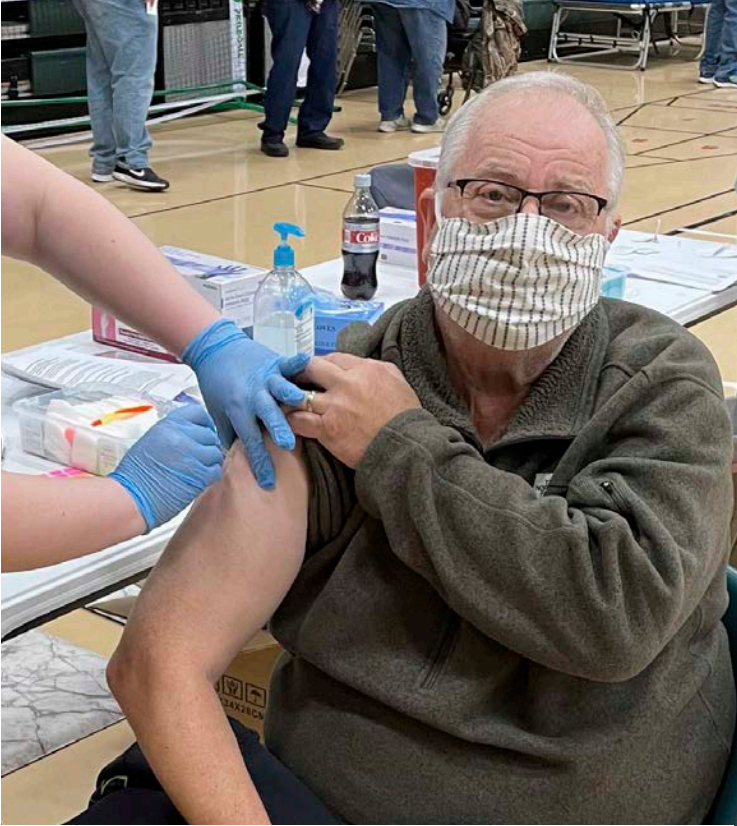
AFSCME’s Personal Support Program (PSP) offers free, professional, confidential assistance to represented employees and their covered dependents.

For help, call
800-647-8776



PSP services are available to all state of Illinois, city of Chicago and Cook County AFSCME members. Other members may be eligible depending on their union contract. Check with your local union for more information.

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 President Larry Brown gets his COVID-19 vaccine.

Illinois retirees get vaccinated

ILLINOIS RESIDENTS AGED 65 and older are now eligible to receive the safe, effective vaccines against COVID-19, and union retirees are already taking advantage.

"I'm a Type 2 diabetic who battled breast cancer and a stroke a few years ago, so I'm definitely in the high-risk category for COVID-19," said Barb Franklin, president of sub-chapter 88, which represents retiree members from Champaign, Piatt and Vermilion Counties.

Franklin is one of many retirees in the state of Illinois who have already received their first dose of the COVID vaccine after Governor Pritzker moved

the state into phase 1b, which prioritizes vaccinations for those over 65.

The only side effect Franklin experienced was fatigue the

day after receiving her first shot, but that feeling subsided a day later.

"I understand that some seniors have been worried about taking the vaccine," Franklin said, "but in fact, the risk is far outweighed by the benefits of protection."

Juliette Freeman, an officer of sub-chapter 163 in southern Cook County, said that she and her husband plan to get the vaccine after having some reservations initially.

"Our family is very aware that historically Black people have been used as guinea pigs by the medical community in the United States, so we are wary of new medications," Freeman said. "That said, I have a biology degree and after in-depth research and discussion, we decided that the risks of taking the vaccine were definitely outweighed by the consequences if we don't. I don't want to be the person that infects those I love."

Freeman and Franklin both encouraged their fellow retirees to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Retiree sub-chapters give back to community

AFSCME RETIREES SUB-CHAPTERS across the state are donating money and goods to community organizations struggling to keep up with demand for assistance during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Sub-chapter 55 members are grateful for the much-needed services that the local non-profit organizations have provided over this difficult period," said John Weir, president of sub-chapter 55, representing retirees in Saline, Gallatin, Pope and Hardin Counties. "That's why we decided to make donations to the Fowler-Bonan Foundation's Coats for Kids,

Eldorado First Baptist Church's Community Food Ministry, CASA of Saline County, and the 4C's Homeless Shelter & Food Pantry."

Sub-chapter 93 retirees from Franklin, Johnson, Mas-

"This is a time that we all need to pitch in."

sac and Williamson Counties made a \$250 donation to the Salvation Army of Southern Illinois. The sub-chapter chose the charity because of the diversity of services it provides to a large number of communities.

"While they are part of the St. Louis Food Network, they also operate a thrift store and food pantry and provide social services," said President Al Latoza. "This is a time that we all need to pitch in, especially to local charities that are currently overwhelmed."

Low-income retirees face challenges

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE for Retirement Security (NIRS) reports that retirement security varies greatly along the income spectrum, and the retirement savings programs that work best for low-income workers often are not the same as the programs that work well for high-income workers.

Social Security functions as a critical source of retirement income for older adults


with incomes below \$40,000, whereas high-income households benefit more from defined-contribution plans, such as 401(k)s. In 2016, older adult households with less than \$40,000 in annual income received 70% or more of their income from Social Security. This contrasts with households of incomes over \$80,000, who only received 24% of their income from Social Security.

There is a sharp divide in wealth between homeowners and renters, even in the same income category. According to data from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, older homeowners in the lowest quarter of income-earners had non-housing wealth of \$12,500; older renters in the same income category had non-housing wealth of just \$1,100.

This sharp divide persists up the income ladder and is just one example of how disproportionate ownership of financial assets drive wealth and savings differences among retirees.

There are ways to improve the retirement security of low-income individuals.

"NIRS, AFSCME and the Alliance for Retired Americans support strengthening and expanding Social Security," said AFSCME Council 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe. Enhancing Social Security's minimum benefit to keep retirees with low career earnings out of poverty would raise the incomes of many older adults.

"We will be strongly advocating the expansion of Social Security under the Biden administration and will call on AFSCME Chapter 31 members to be a voice for all retirees," Britton-Sipe said. 



AFSCME retirees like members of Sub-Chapters 93 (left) and 55 (right) are donating money and goods to community organizations struggling to meet heightened demand for services.



Brad Hardcastle

AFSCME Local 1960

TELECOMMUNICATOR, METCAD
CITY OF CHAMPAIGN

Tell us about your job at Metropolitan Computer Aided Dispatch (METCAD).

I'm a telecommunicator II at METCAD, a consolidated dispatch center. We cover non-emergency and 911 lines and police and fire dispatches for all the villages and cities in Champaign County—including police and fire agencies—and the university.

In 2020, METCAD answered approximately 214,908 calls, including 99,979 emergency calls and 114,929 non-emergency calls, while dispatching 153,278 of those calls to 35 different police and fire departments in Champaign County.

“We’re the first responders. We let police, fire and EMTs know about the emergency and do our best to help until they can get there.”

You never do the same thing two days in a row. If you're taking non-emergency calls, you get dogs loose, noise complaints, COVID violations, routing people to the right place in city departments. On the emergency side, you have bar fights, car accidents, domestic violence, shootings.

When you work dispatch, you have to prioritize what's next for the limited officer resources. Sometimes the callers have to wait a long time for help and you have to use your skills to calm that person down over the phone until an officer can get there. If you're a police dispatcher, you want all your officers to go home at the end of the night.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

We're the first responders. We let police, fire and EMTs know about the emergency and do our best to help until they can get there.

We're the ultimate problem solvers. A lot of times people call 911 because they don't know what to do. So we figure out what they need and where to refer them to. We might be able to handle the issue over the phone by referring them to a homeless shelter or social service agency to help them out and not tie up a police officer.

Our local union and the city of Champaign have a really good relationship. Right now we're in a staffing shortage and we've had labor-management meetings to help find solutions. Our relationship lends to a collaborative working environment and that helps all around. Morale is taking a hit with the staff shortage, but we don't ignore the problem. We're working on making it better.

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

You never know what's on the other end of that line. It could be that someone is having a heart attack and you have to help a family member do CPR. The next day you're helping to deliver a baby. That's what I like about it.

Last year was the first baby I had born over the phone. Most of the time the fire department can get there, but this call was from a rural area

with a volunteer fire department and they couldn't get there in time. So I helped deliver the baby. It was awesome to hear that cry over the phone.

What have you learned from your job?

We're all emergency medical dispatch certified, which means we're trained to deal with 33 protocols from allergic reactions to heart attacks, child birth to lightning strikes, burns to cold exposure. I've had a couple CPR saves, a baby who stopped breathing that we got breathing again—who turned out to be a police officer's baby. There have been a couple critical incidents, big shootings, where I was in charge of the room and as a team, we got through it. It was good to be part of a team to work through those incidents together.

I train new staff. One of the first things I tell them is that you can't take anything home with you. It's not good for your mental health or for your family. Make sure you have a hobby, playing baseball, building model trains. You need that outlet and stress reliever or else it's going to eat you up. But the good definitely outweighs the bad.

How does having a union job impact your life?

I have a pension, good pay. I'm in for the long haul. I bought a house about five years ago. Being able to negotiate good terms makes for a better life. Especially right now, during COVID, or back in the 2008 recession, we were able to maintain our pay and benefits through it all. I'm getting married in October. My fiancé and I are both involved in civic organizations. Because of my good union job, I don't have to work two jobs. I can put my time and effort into that important work too. 