



August 18, 2015

Dear Lawmaker:

I know the Governor's office is intensifying pressure on you to sustain his veto of SB 1229, the fair arbitration bill. Unfortunately, his crusade against this bill is based on hyperbole and misinformation. I wanted to respond specifically to some of the key misrepresentations in the governor's memo sent to you today.

**Arbitration is not a dangerous and alien idea. In fact, it is already in state law.** As you know, this legislation merely extends to state workers the same fair arbitration process that Illinois law has provided for more than 30 years to municipal police and fire personnel and to state prison employees and state troopers.

**Arbitration could avoid a strike if negotiations fail.** Nothing in the legislation compels the parties to go to arbitration. In fact, either side could choose arbitration if negotiations fail to produce a settlement. As such, the bill does not short-circuit the negotiating process, but offers an additional path to a settlement free of the hardship, conflict and disruption that a lockout or strike could cause.

AFSCME has said repeatedly, and I reiterate, that it is our preference to reach a settlement at the bargaining table. We've been working diligently to achieve that goal and intend to continue to do so.

Our union has a four-decade track record with six different governors (and countless mayors, county executives and other elected leaders) of doing just that—bargaining in good faith to reach an agreement. The Rauner Administration does not have any such track record. The governor can point only to one settlement reached for one small unit of state workers on his watch.

On the other hand, we have his bellicose statements made more than once on the campaign trail that he'll "take a strike and shut down state government" in order to impose his demands on state workers.

State employees remain deeply troubled by the threats he made then and the related actions he takes now: Reports of the administration recruiting strikebreakers among retirees or the National Guard; false characterizations of the compensation now earned by state workers and the proposals our union has made in negotiations; legislative poison-pill demands that would wipe out workers' rights as a precondition of enacting other unrelated policies.

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**Arbitration is fair.** The governor is wrong to insult the reputation of the experienced professionals who serve as independent arbitrators. Arbitrators are mutually chosen by both the employer and the union and they are guided by the law to consider factors including the state's financial condition in crafting a fair settlement. There is no evidence to suggest that they rely on only a few states in forming their opinions, and even a cursory review of the arbitration decisions listed on the state labor board's website makes clear that they rule at least as often—if not more often—in favor of the employer as the union.

**False claims.** It's regrettable that the governor's memo resorts to repeating disproven claims about state employee compensation. Illinois state employees do not earn salaries far in excess of other states, and a University of Illinois study found that state and local government workers earn 13.5% less than comparable private sector workers.

The governor's misstatements about the pay of child protection workers, correctional officers, nurses, emergency responders, caregivers and all the other men and women who do the real work of state government are particularly offensive given the six-figure salaries and political clout hires reported among the governor's own top staff. His administration's push to replace a pay scale based on a worker's job and experience with one based on who the boss likes best would open the door wide to similar cronyism throughout state government.

The governor's claim that the union's initial economic proposal would cost the state \$1.6 billion borders on the ludicrous. The administration has failed to produce any accounting of this number, despite our union's requests for the calculations to back it up. The governor's memo likewise distorts many other of our proposals: AFSCME has not made a single proposal to "increase pension benefits"; we have proposed almost no changes to the state health plan; and our proposals regarding overtime are intended to reduce it, not increase it, but the administration has rejected them.

**Act in the public interest, override the veto.** One has to ask why the administration is resorting to such desperate tactics to defeat a perfectly reasonable piece of legislation. Why the over-the-top rhetoric, habitual falsehoods and political pressure tactics? The only plausible explanation is that the bill would provide stability where the governor wants conflict. The bill would prevent a strike when the governor has vowed to force one. And if negotiations fail to produce an agreement, the bill could allow independent arbitrators to craft a fair settlement instead of giving the governor free rein to impose his extreme demands.

In the end, each legislator must vote their conscience and their constituents. We hope you will look at all the facts and, in the name of ensuring stability of public services and fairness for public service workers, override the veto to enact SB 1229.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely yours,  
  
Roberta Lynch  
Executive Director