



DCFS Employees: Meeting the Challenges

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



BY ROBERTA
LYNCH

**WE STOOD
OUR GROUND
AND WOULD
NOT BE
MOVED**

Nothing has gone as the IPI or

Bruce Rauner planned

AFSCME members all across Illinois have recently been the targets of yet another mail blitz from the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI), practically begging us to drop our union membership.

The mailer claims that the IPI wants to make sure that union members know their rights. But the only right mentioned is the right to surrender the safeguards of a strong union contract, safety on the job, fixed hours of work, overtime pay and a decent standard of living.

Sure, the IPI asserts that public employees could still have all the rights that a union contract provides—and without paying a dime. But it conveniently fails to mention that if our union is robbed of financial resources—and the backing of a strong, united membership—then it will become increasingly difficult to secure and enforce those rights.

The very essence of the term “union” is people joining together, in this case to act for their common good. If there is no true union of purpose, then there can be no progress.

The Illinois Policy Institute cares not a whit about the rights to respect and fairness on the job for public employees. Just the opposite: The IPI consistently wages war on those rights. It has launched a major attack on the AFSCME collective bargaining agreement for state employees, alleging that pay rates are excessively high, benefits too generous, disciplinary procedures “lax,” overtime pay “exorbitant,” and “privileges” (whatever that term means) “lavish.”

The IPI’s goal is simple: They want to strip away all those hated economic gains and workplace rights embodied in public employees’ union contracts.

And, of course, that’s exactly what their long-time financial backer and former enforcer Bruce Rauner tried to do. As governor, he withheld sched-

uled step increases for four years, pushed to send employee health care costs through the roof, sought to gut protections against wanton privatization and cronyism, and refused to negotiate in good faith with our union for a new contract.

But standing together, AFSCME members in state government refused to be bullied or broken. Our union fought back on every front—with worksite pickets and massive rallies, in the legislative arena and in the courts. We stood our ground and would not be moved.

That kind of defiant determination was reflected in dozens of other battles AFSCME members at every level of government have been fighting.

In Kane County, employees stood firm against a county board chair who tried to cheat them out of negotiated wage increases. In Sangamon County, public health workers have voted to authorize a strike rather than take the paltry pay increases management has on the table. In Rockford, school bus drivers beat back an attempt by the school board to privatize their jobs. The list could go on.

The Illinois Policy Institute and Rauner also teamed up to continue the assault on public employee pensions. Rauner repeatedly tried to move various pension reduction schemes through the Illinois General Assembly, but the Illinois Supreme Court ruling that the public employee unions won upholding the pension protection clause of the state constitution provided a strong firewall against him. The IPI actually went so far as to call on Rauner to just outright fire every state employee—then hire them back, minus their

pension benefits!

But nothing has quite gone as planned for the IPI and the shadowy elite that provide its big-bucks budget. Instead—with a big assist from organized labor—Rauner was run out of office by one of the largest losing margins for an incumbent in decades and a new governor was voted in who actually respects public employees and their unions.

One of JB Pritzker’s first acts as governor was to restore scheduled step increases to state employees. Then, in just a few short months of bargaining with the Pritzker Administration, AFSCME members in state government concluded negotiations on a new contract that restores step increases, includes pay increases to keep up with the cost of living and improves job safety.

And instead of AFSCME members dropping out of their union when the anti-worker majority on the U.S. Supreme Court voted to ban fair share fees, more than a thousand former feepayers have signed up to become union members!

So, the reason the IPI is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on mailings to AFSCME members—and even to members of Chapter 31 Retirees—is clear. It’s called desperation. We’re the target because we’re succeeding. By standing together as a union, we’re continuing to improve the lives of working families, not drive down family income as the IPI so desperately wants to do.

Every time an IPI mailing goes out, AFSCME receives countless messages of support from employees who see right through the sham solicitation and vow to keep standing in solidarity with their co-workers as union members.

We’ve come a very long way since that cold day Bruce Rauner was elected in the fall of 2014. It’s been a rough ride to be sure. But we’re AFSCME Strong—and stronger for it—and we’re not going to stop now.



On the MOVE

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Hundreds of frontline staff from community disability and youth care agencies lobbied their legislators at the State Capitol in Springfield on May 1 at AFSCME's DSP and Youth Care Lobby Day.

Historic gains in 2019 legislative session

Progress for AFSCME members

In his first months as governor, JB Pritzker and state lawmakers pulled off a historic, game-changing 2019 legislative session. After nearly four years of gridlock under Bruce Rauner, they managed to increase the minimum wage, put fair tax reform on the 2020 ballot, pass a bipartisan balanced budget, and more.

The AFSCME lobbying team was on the ground through it all, advancing the interests and concerns of union members.

Pritzker's better budget

Using new revenues to increase funding for public services, a \$40 billion balanced budget for fiscal year 2020 was approved with bipartisan support.

It begins to pay down more than \$6 billion in unpaid bills, gives an additional \$130 million to the chronically under-funded Department of Children and Family Services (see page 4), includes funds to reconstruct the Quincy Veteran's Home and spends \$375 million more on public education.

The budget and an ambitious \$45 billion capital construction plan are balanced by increasing taxes on gas, parking garages and cigarettes, as well as increased vehicle registration fees. And future

revenues are promised with the fair tax, which would bring in \$3 billion in new revenue from people making more than a quarter-million dollars a year.

AFSCME lobbied successfully for several initiatives included in the final budget plan adopted by the General Assembly.

Raises in disability, youth care

The budget includes a 3.5% rate increase for DHS-funded community disability agencies and a 5% increase for DCFS-funded youth care agencies. AFSCME members work as direct service personnel (DSPs), paraeducators and more at those agencies and have been working tirelessly toward fair wages for years.

"In an extraordinarily challenging time, we are one

step closer to a fair wage for frontline staff at disability and youth care agencies across the state," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "AFSCME members lobbied legislators in their districts and at the State Capitol. They spoke directly to the governor's office and delivered thousands of postcards to his door. They told their story in the media. And they never gave up."

While the budget implementation bill specifically mentions wages, there is no requirement as to the share of the increase that must be used to raise pay. For disability agencies, DHS is directed to issue guidelines on implementation by August 1.

"AFSCME local unions must be prepared to negotiate their share of the increase," Lynch said. "Our strength and unity at the state Capitol is the reason we succeeded. Now we take that same strength and unity to the bargaining table."

Back pay for employee steps

After Bruce Rauner froze step increases in 2015, AFSCME challenged that action in court and won.

The Pritzker Administration agreed to honor the Labor Board order and

employees were placed on their proper step as of April 1. And the budget makes state employees whole by funding unpaid back wages, including 7% interest (see page 7).

AFSCME moves forward

Of the thousands of bills introduced in this session, those supported by AFSCME were largely successful. Here are some examples:

PASSED

PUTTING A FAIR TAX ON THE BALLOT

Voters will decide in 2020 whether to amend the Illinois Constitution to allow for a fair income tax structure in which the wealthy pay their share, bringing in \$3 billion to invest in public services and reduce debt.

PROTECTING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

The Collective Bargaining Freedom Act protects any collective bargaining agreements between employers and employees and prohibits any restrictions on collective bargaining in local governments.

PROTECTING RIGHTS OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Ensures that educational support personnel retain their accrued benefits when they resume employment after a lay-off by the school board.

PROTECTING DISABILITY BENEFITS

Ensures that any participant in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) retains disability benefits when they move between employers who participate in the IMRF.

PROTECTING HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

Prohibits the state from applying for any federal waiver that would reduce or eliminate any protection or coverage required under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), including pre-existing conditions and essential benefits.

BLOCKED

ATTACK ON PUBLIC PENSIONS

SCJRCA 9 was voted down. It would have established a ballot measure to amend the pension protection clause of the Illinois Constitution, which currently ensures that pension benefits cannot be diminished. 

DCFS employees: Meeting the challenges

AFSCME members push for better funding, adequate staff

Recent tragedies in which children died as a result of abuse or neglect—and a coinciding Office of the Inspector General report on child deaths—have brought a barrage of negative attention to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

AFSCME is working to ensure the public gets the full story.

Years of mismanagement, underfunding and tumult at the top (there have been 15 different directors in the last 16 years) have placed growing

strains on the agency. An increasing reliance on private vendors to carry out core functions has further exacerbated these problems.

While investigations are solely done in-house by highly

trained DCFS employees, placement services—adoption and foster care, for example—and Intact Family Services are almost totally privatized.

AFSCME is making progress in the fight to improve staffing and reverse privatization, especially in high-risk Intact cases.

When a call is made to the DCFS hotline, AFSCME-represented hotline workers decide if a situation needs to be investigated. If it does, a child protection investigator works to assess if there is abuse and neglect and whether it rises to

a level requiring the children's removal from the home.

If they must remove a child, DCFS must find a safe place for the child, with family members or a foster placement.

If an investigator finds the child can remain with the family with the right assistance and supports, Intact Family Services tries to keep the family together by helping them address whatever crises they're experiencing.

To be successful, families receiving Intact services need a caseworker dedicated to getting them the services they

need—from substance abuse and mental health treatment to parenting classes—and making sure they're doing what's necessary to keep their child safe.

But a core problem is that more than 80% of Intact cases are handled outside of DCFS.

"Families with children who are at high risk are kept intact because the hope is that the family's issues can be resolved with support," AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Anne Irving said. "But the private agencies are sometimes unable to deliver services at the level needed for a high-risk family to succeed. These kinds of cases require the consistency and level of training that only DCFS workers provide."

New administration takes over

Governor JB Pritzker appointed Marc D. Smith, a former DCFS public service administrator and private sector service provider, as DCFS director. The governor also ordered an independent review of the department's Intact unit by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall policy research center, asking for "actionable recommendations."

The study found "systemic influences that create barriers to effective service delivery to Intact families, including inter-related structural, procedural, and cultural challenges."

It also noted that most Intact cases are handled by private providers who, because



AFSCME Local 2081 member Alishia Glover taping a TV interview to help tell the story of the challenges DCFS employees face.



Alishia Glover

Child Protection Advanced Specialist
Local 2081, Chicago

I believe in the work. I never want to see a child hurt or abused and that's what drives me. This is my part to play—trying to keep kids safe, in good homes, and helping parents give their children what they need.

I've seen a lot of happy endings in my 25 years. When I worked in Intact services, I saw parents turn things around, become employed, get housing, enroll their kids in school. In child protection, I'm able to see them get that process started.

Unfortunately, there's been understaffing for as long as I've been in the department. We go above and beyond to get the work done—there's no such thing as 8:30 to 5:00 in child protection—but there isn't enough staff.

Often, it's a private agency that's doing the follow-up work, not AFSCME union members at DCFS. The skill set, the training, the requirements of becoming an employee of DCFS—all that's different at a private agency. We're better equipped to help families.

If the public knew about the underfunding and the outsourcing, I don't think they'd be so quick to blame investigators who are just trying to do their job.



Arnold Black

Child Protection Supervisor
Local 2971, Champaign

I love the work that we do. You have to have a passion for it because you don't do it for the money. You do it to keep kids safe and you do it to the best of your ability.

We make a difference. We figure out what's going on with the family and assess what they need. Everything is compounded. Maybe you need brakes for your car so you can get to work. Or if you don't have food, you might not be able to deal with kids who are crying. So, let's get the brakes fixed and get your family groceries, then see what we can do next.

When you drop from 4,000 employees to 2,000, that's a huge problem. The job becomes impossible. You're always running and can only touch a portion of your caseload.

The union standing committee meets quarterly with the director. We're a constant reminder in management's ear about things that we want to see done. And we work collaboratively to make change.

We've made some progress with the staffing issues and that's been a stress relief, but there still aren't enough DCFS employees to cover the high-risk cases.



Heidi Creasy

DCFS Investigator
Local 51, Peoria

Taking kids away from their home is the hardest thing you'll do in this job. We absolutely must have evidence of an urgent and immediate necessity to remove a child. And we can only respond to these situations with the information that we're given.

But if we do remove a child into our care, we must be in front of a judge within 48 hours. The judge decides if the child goes back home.

There have been cases in which children have been returned home and something tragic happens, but DCFS employees didn't make that decision, the court made that decision. We're the ones that get blamed, but our hands are tied.

I've been doing this kind of work for more than 25 years. The worst I've seen was under the Rauner administration. We had hiring freezes so when people retired, transferred or quit, those positions just remained vacant.

There's a great deal of pressure and a lot of responsibility in this job, but it's great. And I have a phenomenal union. AFSCME's team has worked with management to get us staff and I am profoundly grateful. In Peoria County, there's been 15-20 new staff hired in the last year and we even have back-up staff at the ready. It's been night and day. Our efforts are working.



Marci Malnar

Investigations Supervisor
Local 1048, Southern Illinois

I've been doing this job for 25 years and despite all the hard times, I know we're helping children and we're saving lives. Because of the union and our standing committee with management, we can make changes for the better.

One of our supervisors was stabbed in the Cairo office so we worked to get a security officer at every office and management is developing a self-defense training. Without AFSCME we wouldn't have that.

Sometimes it's a long fight. We've been fighting for over a decade to try to do instant drug testing. Methamphetamine presents an immediate safety threat to children, but it's three to four weeks before we get test results.

Protecting children is not just what I do, it's who I am. And I am not special by any means. I stand with thousands of public service workers who do similar things. Some have given their lives serving the public.

Through our union we can advocate for things we need to do our job better. We can tell management what's broken, and we can be the voice for the babies and children who don't have one. That's why AFSCME is so important. By uniting together in a collective voice, we can make all the difference in the world.

"Through our union we can advocate for things we need to do our job better."

the pay rate for these services decreases after six months of management, too often don't try to extend that timeframe to ensure positive outcomes.

At a May 15 news

conference, Pritzker said the ongoing challenges facing DCFS are "systemic" and "a result of misguided decisions, underdeveloped program rollouts and unacceptable funding cuts."

AFSCME members work for change

The AFSCME DCFS Standing Committee has been a consistent voice of reason and forewarning. Made up of AFSCME members from across the state, the group meets quarterly with department leadership.

Because of AFSCME's efforts, high-risk Intact cases

are gradually being brought back in-house. Gov. Pritzker signed a budget that includes \$130 million in additional funding and 300 new staff. Union members are pushing for some to be Intact staff.

The union has helped reduce investigations caseloads by pushing DCFS to fill staff vacancies. Vacancies are a big problem; they generate too-high caseloads, which can result in dangerous situations

for at-risk children.

To shed light on the progress being made, AFSCME members are reaching out.

"We're doing a lot to make sure that policy makers, the media and the public better understand the difficult work DCFS employees do," Irving said. "When tragedy occurs, an individual worker shouldn't be scapegoated for what is a systemic, continued problem with funding and staffing." 

AFSCME Strong in Joliet

AFSCME Local 440 members committed to being 100% Union

Local 440 President David Gornick credits three main things for his local union's success: engagement, communication and unity.

Of the 300 members of AFSCME Local 440, full-time employees at the City of Joliet are 100% Union and the Joliet Housing Authority is nearly there as well.

Engagement

"We try to keep everybody involved," Gornick said of the local's efforts. "If you want to see changes, you've got to be part of your union. You can't just rely on a couple people to do the work."

One way the local keeps members engaged is by holding regular, informative union meetings that welcome new members and cover important issues. If you miss the meeting, you miss a lot, Gornick said, and that keeps attendance high.

The local also builds engagement by doing charitable work together in the community.

"If we know there's someone in need, we try to help them out," Gornick said. "One year the community center didn't have the money for Christmas presents or a party, so we collected

donations. Another time we all went out together and helped hand out food to the needy. We just try to give back to the city."

The local hooks up with other unions to do community service as well. Recently some volunteers worked with members of the building trades union to help clean up the historic Joliet Prison, clearing out brush and debris so the city could use the space.

Communication

When new employees join the local, Gornick, the executive board and the membership chair reach out to explain what the union means and what the contract does for them—and to sign them up as dues-paying members.

"We've had good contracts over the years with good wages and health insurance," Gornick said. "They see what we have and that motivates them to join the union and keep it strong. I explain that if you aren't a member and you aren't paying the dues, we won't have the money to fight the fights we



AFSCME Local 440 at the City of Joliet focuses on member engagement to stay AFSCME Strong.

"Everybody is looking out for everybody. It's a team effort."

need to protect the gains we've made together."

Unity

The breadth of work done by the local makes unity a critical component of their success, and the local union executive board represents every department so that no one's needs are neglected.

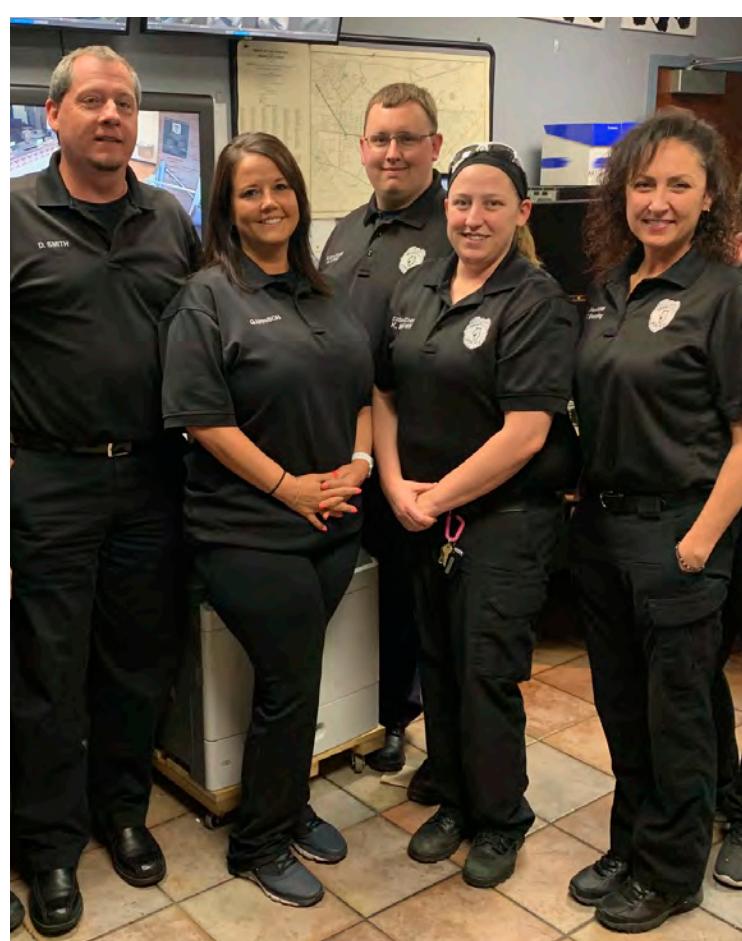
Gornick is the chief operator at the wastewater treatment plant. Other members also work in the water and sewer plants, in the public works department or in administration. There are clerical workers, dispatchers, mechanics, case workers, engineers, inspectors, electricians and more. The local has also brought in new members in recent years, formerly exempt positions that petitioned to join the union because they were not treated fairly.

In negotiations, Local 440 knows that sticking together as a unit makes them stronger as a whole. The AFSCME local even reaches out to other unions represented in the city

to ensure fair treatment across the board for public employees in Joliet, including police and fire.

Over the years, the unions have banded together to stop layoffs and prevent the city from making cuts to health insurance. And AFSCME members have won gains in wages and benefits by standing strong together at the bargaining table.

"After all the attacks we've had, we've learned how important it is to stay united," Gornick said. "Everybody is looking out for everybody. You can't let differences get in your way. It's a team effort. And as a result, we're treated pretty fairly." 



Granite City police dispatchers of AFSCME Local 3405 celebrated National Public Service Telecommunicators Week in April.

Telecommunicators seek new classification

Public safety telecommunicators in police stations and 911 call centers across the country have saved countless lives since the 911 system was created 52 years ago. Yet too often they're seen as administrative workers, not classified as law enforcement or fire personnel.

During National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week (April 14-20), 911 employees from across the country called for change with legislation called the 911 SVES (Supporting Accurate Views of Emergency Services) Act.

AFSCME is backing the legislation, which would update

the Office of Management and Budget's classification of 911 call-takers and dispatchers from administrative support to protective service occupations, reflecting these workers' roles in saving the lives of first responders and the public. The bill would provide increased training, funding and

workplace protections for more than 100,000 public safety telecommunicators.

"After more than 17 years as a 911 dispatcher, I know firsthand the challenges our public safety dispatchers face, the stress they are put under, and the critical importance of their work," said U.S. Congresswoman Norma J. Torres of California (D), a champion of the legislation. "Without dispatchers, law enforcement, firefighters and EMTs wouldn't be able to do their jobs."

The House bill was introduced on March 7 and a Senate companion bill was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on April 3. 

“We don’t give up”

AFSCME state employees finally receive steps, back pay and interest

AFSCME members never quit battling for justice after ousted governor Bruce Rauner illegally froze employee step increases on July 1, 2015. Finally—after fighting for nearly four years—state of Illinois employees are now receiving paychecks that reflect their proper step placement. And they’re set to get back pay via an appropriation included in the FY 2020 state budget.

It’s been a long fight. AFSCME first filed unfair labor practice charges with the Labor Board in 2015, then took the case to appellate court where a three-judge panel ruled unanimously that the step increases were owed. Then the case went back to the Labor Board, which was charged with shaping the remedy. Rauner kept fighting against fairness, using every legal maneuver in the book to deny employees their wages.

“I never received a raise, but the cost of living steadily increased. My rent has increased at least \$300,” said Johanna McKinney, an AFSCME Local 1805 member and human services caseworker at the DHS office in East St. Louis for the last five years. “As workers we kept our end of the bargain. But I was not compensated in the way I was supposed to be.”

“It was a struggle. I worked a lot of overtime to feed my kids,” Tonya Banks said. She’s worked as a CNA at the Anna Veterans’ Home for 14 years and is a member of AFSCME Local 3280. Banks

2016 and leads the Member Action Team in her local. “We fought for what we’ve earned through our jobs, our hard work, and our commitment to serve our communities.”

Rodriguez traveled to Springfield with her father to rally for fair pay at the State Capitol. She said the experience was something she’ll never forget.

“It’s been an exciting time to be alive,” she said. “I got to witness what a group of people fighting together can do. It’s an inspiration to stand up for what’s fair and my dad was proud to see me do it.”

New governor, new future

Fighting on all fronts, AFSCME joined the entire Illinois labor movement in working to defeat Bruce Rauner at the polls last fall. On November 8, Rauner lost to JB Pritzker by the largest margin in any gubernatorial election in years.

“Everything Rauner was getting away with was scary,”

“It’s been an exciting time to be alive, to witness what a group of people fighting together can do.”

is a single mother to four children, the oldest of who is headed to college. “When you’ve got kids, you depend on your job. It was hard.”

AFSCME kept fighting back. The union used every legal tool at its disposal. Members picketed at worksites and rallied at the state Capitol.

“We weren’t asking anything out of the ordinary, just what was fair,” AFSCME Local 2806 member Eunice Rodriguez said. She’s worked for the state in the south side Chicago DHS office since

Rodriguez said. “I worried we’d have to strike. It took years of perseverance, but good things happen and now he’s out of the office. Now I look forward to a brighter future.”

From the outset, Gov. Pritzker recognized the need to comply with court and labor board rulings. As one of his first acts in office, he directed that all employees be placed on their proper step, including longevity steps, effective April 1.

The Pritzker Administration kept that pledge, helping

thousands of union members begin to get their family finances back on track.

Back pay—with interest

Pritzker also committed to paying back wages owed due to the freeze, including the board-ordered 7% interest.

AFSCME pressed for an appropriation to be included in the final budget and on June 1, that funding for unpaid back wages was approved by the state legislature.

“We backed the right candidate not only for our union, but for our state,” McKinney said. “It’s nice to have a reprieve. I can breathe easier because the state will honor their commitment and I’m so grateful we have a strong union who fought on our behalf.”

“I was ready to get my step raise and I can’t wait to get my back pay,” Banks said. “I’ve already cut back on my overtime a little bit. If not for the union, we would have never seen them. I’m very thankful.”

Continuing to serve

AFSCME members never stopped serving their communities throughout the turmoil of the Rauner Administration. They’re dedicated to continuing that same high-quality public service far into the future.

“I love my job,” McKinney said. “I was a customer of the state, receiving benefits when I was out of work. It was my caseworker who said this job would be a good fit for me. I like the opportunity to give back in the way that was given to me when I was in need.”

“I’m a vocational rehabilitation coordinator, helping people with disabilities find and retain jobs or continue their education,” Rodriguez said. “It’s an amazing experience. I work with great people in my office, we’re all passionate about our jobs.”

“I thank god every day for my job,” Banks said. “I have a good relationship with the residents and I really care for them.”

McKinney, Rodriguez and Banks all agree: The hard fight for justice was worth it.



AFSCME members in state locals across Illinois celebrated finally receiving their step raises after four long years of fighting for justice.



AFSCME leadership shakes hands with state negotiators as a tentative agreement is reached.

AFSCME STRONG!

With A New Contract, State Employees Win at Last

AFTER FOUR LONG YEARS,

more than 35,000 AFSCME members in state government have finally won their fight for a fair contract.

The AFSCME State Bargaining Committee—made up of more than 200 representatives from every local and led by Executive Director Roberta Lynch and Deputy Director Mike Newman—reached a tentative agreement with the Pritzker Administration on May 31 and members ratified the contract in statewide meetings in June.

“AFSCME members in state government endured four years of Bruce Rauner’s adamant refusal to negotiate in good faith to reach a fair contract settlement, his unrelenting attacks on state workers, his illegal step-increase freeze, and his false declaration of impasse,” Lynch said.

“Through it all, members stood together and stood firm. The union is stronger than ever today because of that struggle, and state employees have, once again, the economic security and job protections that a union contract provides.”

The new agreement, in effect through June 30, 2023, includes none of the harmful changes to current contract rights and protections that Bruce Rauner was demanding:

- ✓ **NO weakening of limits on privatization.**
- ✓ **NO reduction in overtime pay.**
- ✓ **NO diminishment of current layoff protections.**
- ✓ **NO weakening of seniority as a factor in promotions.**
- ✓ **NO elimination of the step plan.**

In fact, the contract expands benefits, rights and protections for union members.

“Illinois has turned another important page from years of brutal ideological warfare,” said Gov. J.B. Pritzker of the agreement between the state and the union. His chief negotiator, Robb Craddock, was a stark contrast to Rauner’s John Terranova.

“In the Pritzker administration, AFSCME members have an employer who understands the importance of their work, respects their rights and is a constructive partner in the collective bargaining process,” Lynch said. “But our triumph is a direct result of the determination of the AFSCME Bargaining Committee and AFSCME members across the state who endured the hardships of the Rauner years but never, ever quit.”

The contract provides for 11.5% in wage increases over the next four years, as well as a \$2,500 bonus prorated by years worked since July 1, 2015.

Rauner’s demands for health care premium increases of nearly 120% were finally cleared off the bargaining table. The new schedule of premiums and other out-of-pocket costs will keep health care accessible and affordable for all employees.

The bargaining committee secured many other improvements, including these key wins:

- Making Illinois a leader in family-friendly policies by increasing paid parental leave for birth and adoption to 10 weeks.
- Providing an additional boost for employees on the bottom of the pay scale.
- Greatly strengthening mandatory overtime restrictions, expanding the rights of employees to refuse mandation.
- Establishing a joint labor-management task force on workplace violence and a health and safety committee.
- Making working conditions safer for parole agents by setting specific standards for vehicle replacement.
- Strengthening employee privacy rights, prohibiting the state from providing any bargaining unit employees’ information to third parties.
- Adding titles for upgrades and semi-automatic promotions.

AFSCME STATE BARGAINING COMMITTEE

"Over the course of hundreds of hours in bargaining sessions, the AFSCME Bargaining Committee remained steadfast in their commitment to improve the lives of union members. They sacrificed time with their families, did double duty to keep up with work assignments, and helped to organize the pickets, rallies and strike authorization vote that were part of building public support for our fight. I have never seen a more unified, dedicated and determined group."

– ROBERTA LYNCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Kelly
Phelps**

Local 1964 –
Attorney,
Guardianship and
Advocacy

This feels absolutely fantastic. It was amazing to see what can be done when people respect each other's points of view and work toward the common goal of the greater good.

Our members got nothing under Governor Rauner except a lot of heartache. We were constantly treated poorly in the press and everywhere else and made to feel bad. Governor Pritzker came in and obviously couldn't make us whole for those years, but he did move us forward.

I was incredibly impressed with everyone on the AFSCME bargaining committee and our leadership. We had adult, collaborative conversations that were reflected in negotiations at the table with management. Our negotiations were firm, fair, respectful and considerate.

We got a lot of good things, but we were also very conscious of Illinois' fiscal condition, and what the people of the state expect from their government.



**Keisha
Moore**

Local 3436 – Parole Agent, DOC

The moment we made a deal was very emotional. It felt like we

won the championship. All we needed was confetti to fall from the ceiling.

I'm most proud of representing parole agents in Illinois. Safety issues that affect us had not been brought to light in prior negotiations. This agreement gets us the equipment we need to perform our jobs safely. That was a huge win.

I only wished that other members could have experienced this, to really understand the importance of being an active union member. A lot of people don't understand how much the union fights for our rights and living wages and safety in the workplace. I wish they could have seen this.

To see it all the way through from the start, I was at a loss for words. It was a good feeling of accomplishment.



**Nettie
Smith**

Local 1787 –
Licensed Practical
Nurse, Quincy
Veterans' Home

We came together like never before. We showed we're unified. Through patience, endurance and working as a team, we were able to make a huge improvement in everyone's lives, in their financial stability.

Under Rauner, I felt like employees weren't valued and our veterans weren't valued. Their care wasn't ensured like it should have been. I'm very hopeful that with funding for improvements to the [Quincy] home in the budget and improved communications with the new administration, we're getting on the right road.

If we had not stuck together, we wouldn't be in the position we are now: Looking forward to raises and back pay. We would be paying a lot more for our health insurance. AFSCME fought hard and stayed firm. Where other unions failed, AFSCME Council 31 stood fast and got a good contract. I'm very excited about it.



**Jeffrey
Reighter II**

Local 2856 –
Correctional Officer,
Graham Correctional
Center

It's a big relief not to have to fight every day and finally have a contract that benefits our members.

I'm most proud that we were able to stop our insurance premiums from going up substantially and that we did some good work on mandatory overtime. The contract will hold management accountable so they can't just mandate as they please like they did for so many years.

Without our members coming together and backing us like they did, the bargaining committee wouldn't have been able to last that four years. Especially with our

strike vote. They were willing to strike and put everything on the line for the union. That strengthened us and made us feel like we were doing the right thing. Because of that backing, we weren't wavering. We weren't going to give in. We wanted a fair contract for our members and we finally got it done. There's no way we could have gotten any better.



**Darneice
Cooper**

Local 2806 –
Casework Manager,
Department of
Human Services

We weathered the storm. We truly were in a storm. We were in darkness and I couldn't even see the light. But we stuck in there and we didn't give up. We had strong leadership that helped us succeed and overcome the obstacles that were put in our way—and they were big old mountains, not mud hills.

AFSCME came up with strategies to fight. We fought in the court system and won. And in our new contract there's so much good stuff. There are so many safeguards in there to help members it's unbelievable. So if somebody like Rauner comes back, they are going to have a struggle.

I'm proud to be part of AFSCME Council 31. We brought those mountains down and we came out victorious.



**Elijah
Edwards**

Local 2858 – Staff
Development
Specialist,
Department of
Human Services

We've come out from under the vise grip of fighting Rauner and fighting Janus, and our union is stronger for it. A generation of our membership was baptized under the fire of Rauner. Now, it's definitely a new day.

AFSCME lives solidarity. We said we're not going to take this lying down; we're going to fight every inch of the way. We are something to behold.

Steward invokes Weingarten rights, protects fellow member

The right of union members to have a union steward present during investigatory meetings with management—known as Weingarten rights because they were established in the 1975 Supreme Court case *NLRB v. J. Weingarten Inc.*—is provided under the National Labor Relations Act and public sector collective bargaining laws in Illinois.

Except under select contracts, Weingarten rights must be claimed by employees because supervisors have no obligation to inform them of their rights. AFSCME members routinely assert these rights by having a steward present at interviews during investigations.

A steward's role

As an AFSCME Local 26 steward at Elgin Mental Health Center, Paige Sweeney is often called to represent her fellow employees during investigatory interviews. Security therapy aides, food service workers and doctors can face allegations of wrongdoing by patients at the facility. Every charge is addressed.

One of a steward's key

roles is to take notes and be a witness in case the employer's summary of the meeting or statements are inaccurate.

"I wanted to make sure that this didn't happen again."

"Stewards are present at every investigation to protect employees from being badgered or from incriminating themselves because they don't know the correct terminology or misunderstand the investigator's questions," Sweeney said.

Working in mental health has its own set of challenges.

Sweeney said AFSCME members are sensitive to the unique parameters of the Elgin Mental Health Center. A security therapy aide herself, Sweeney noted that "we want to protect both the patients and the employees."

Taking a stand

Recently, Sweeney was present to witness an Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation of a union member. She took notes during the oral testimony and observed as the employee wrote out her witness statement.

"After she told her side of the story and wrote it down, the member handed me her statement," Sweeney recalled. "I had just started reading it when it was forcibly removed from my hand by the investigator."

Sweeney immediately asserted her rights, saying "I'm a steward and I'm allowed to witness and read this statement." But the investigator refused.

Taken aback, Sweeney allowed the interview to conclude. But she knew the importance of reviewing witness statements, which can be used on cross-examination by the

Weingarten Rights

WHEN YOUR EMPLOYER REQUIRES YOU TO ANSWER QUESTIONS THAT MAY LEAD TO DISCIPLINE, ASSERT YOUR WEINGARTEN RIGHTS:

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative or steward be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions."

employer's attorney. The statements must accurately reflect what the member intended to communicate.

Sweeney took her concerns to her father, Sam Maschinski, a fellow employee and union steward at the center. He agreed with Sweeney's assessment of the situation and urged his daughter to contact the union.

When AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Carla Williams heard what happened, she worked with an AFSCME attorney to file an unfair labor practice charge against the state.

"We knew this was a violation of the union member's Weingarten rights," Williams said, "and we were right."

The charge alleged that the OIG investigator improperly refused to allow a union steward to review an employee's statement at an investigatory interview and improperly justified its action based on an OIG directive that said union representatives are only allowed to act as observers during investigatory interviews.

Know your rights

"It's true that our ability to actively participate during an investigatory interview is somewhat limited, but we can witness, take notes and call for a pause in an interview," Sweeney said. "We can do what we need to represent the employee, including reviewing

written statements, as long as we are not obstructing the investigation in any way."

The state entered into a settlement agreement with the union that fully resolves the allegations in the unfair labor practice charge and confirms the importance of the union steward.

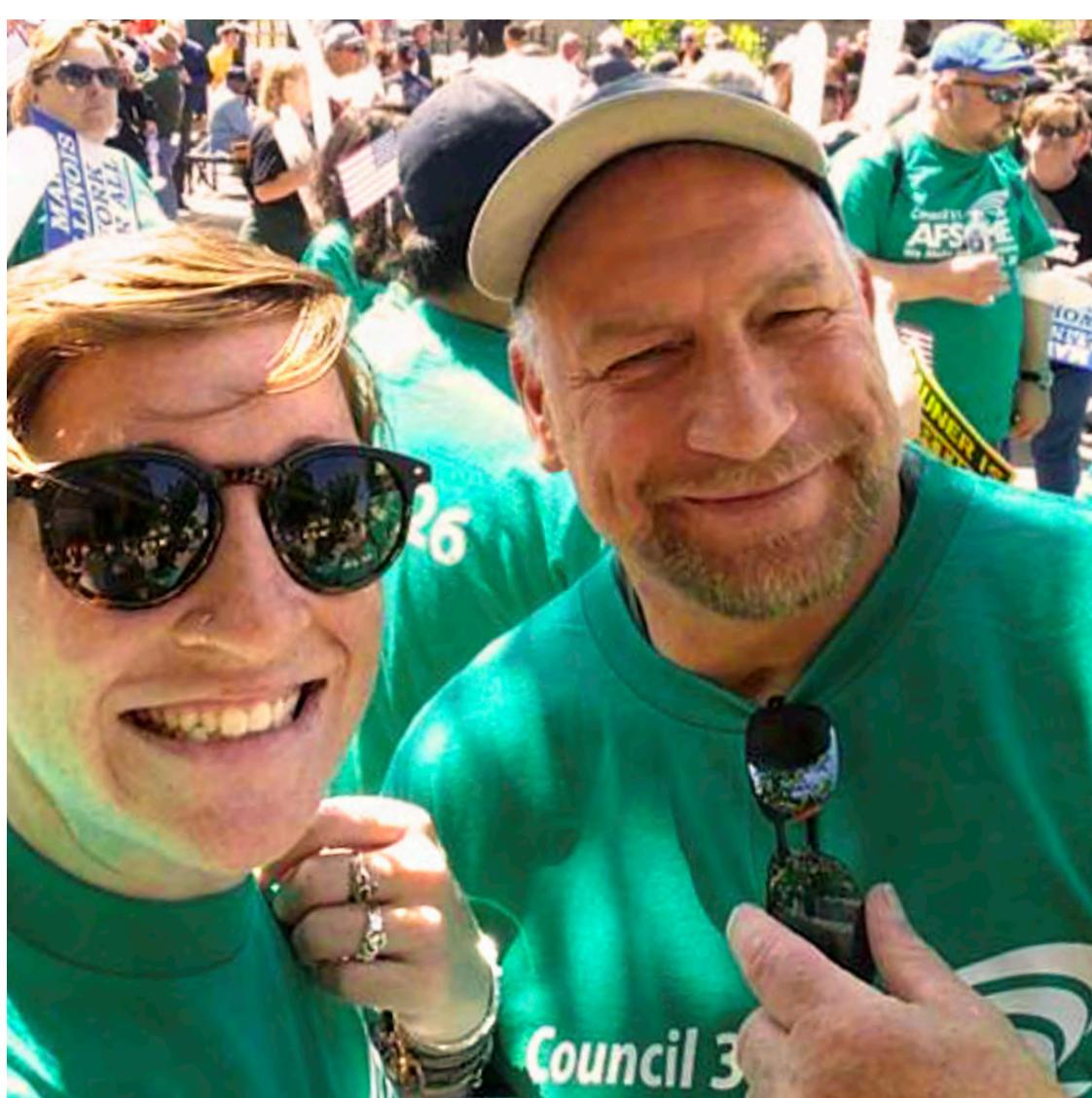
The settlement provides that at investigatory interviews, a union representative must be allowed to observe, take notes and be a witness to investigatory interviews, including reviewing written statements. Further, the OIG was directed to change its rules to comply with the contract and the law.

"I love my job," Sweeney said, reflecting on the challenging work she does every day. "Some days are better than others, but sometimes I see patients change their behavior and go through the process of recovery. They realize they can go back and be a productive member of society. I love being part of that."

She also enjoys her work as a union steward, and thanks her fellow stewards—including her father—for their mentoring and support.

Asked what inspired her to take this matter to the next level, Sweeney is adamant.

"I wanted to make sure that this didn't happen again to anyone else. Violating our rights hinders the system, it doesn't help it."



AFSCME Local 26 stewards Paige Sweeney and her father, Sam Mashinski.

IPI keeps up assault on union members

One year after Janus ruling, lawsuits seek fees already paid



Anti-union plaintiff Mark Janus was a front man for Bruce Rauner in *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*.

Mark Janus, a one-time child support specialist in the Department of Healthcare and Family Services and fair-share member of AFSCME Council 31, was the front man for the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI) and Bruce Rauner in their lawsuit challenging union fair-share fees.

With a firmly anti-union majority on the US Supreme Court, they prevailed there by a 5-4 margin—even though the decision overturned decades of precedent.

On the day the decision was issued in June 2018, Rauner was there, elbowing Janus out of the way to claim ownership of the suit and predicting that public employees would soon leave their unions in droves.

Things haven't turned out as Janus, Rauner or the IPI had planned. Public employee unions have continued to grow all across the country, with many former fee-payers becoming full dues-paying members.

But Mark Janus isn't done yet—and neither is the IPI.

Janus seeking "back pay"

Janus quit state government and is a paid employee of the IPI, traveling the country seeking to weaken labor unions.

In March, he tried and failed to squeeze out thousands of dollars from his former union. He went to federal court in Illinois to try get back all the fees he'd ever paid to AFSCME—though he didn't

offer to give back the pay raises, health care benefits or pension improvements that he

benefited from over that time. U.S. District Judge Robert Gettleman rejected his claim, awarding him nothing and affirming that AFSCME had acted in good faith when it relied on a unanimous Supreme Court ruling of 40 years to set fees for represented employees who opted not to join the union.

That ruling echoed what more than a dozen other federal and state courts have decided in similar cases.

But the IPI is keeping up its anti-union assault, continuing to send mailers pushing AFSCME members and retirees to drop out.

The IPI is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on these mailings, trying to convince members to act against their own self-interest, because the Koch-funded organization wants to wipe out pensions and cut wages, but unions are the chief bulwarks against its efforts.

Class action suit filed

In May, a group of nine state employees filed a class-action lawsuit echoing Janus' failed scheme and seeking \$2 million in fee repayment for 2,700 state employees. The suit covers fees paid from May 1, 2017 (the earliest date possible under the state statute of limitations), to June 28, 2018, when the Supreme Court ended fair share.

The IPI, its Liberty Justice Center and the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation—the same groups behind the original Janus lawsuit—are also bankrolling this effort to drain resources from public employee unions.

"Non-members received wage increases, health insurance coverage, vacation time and other benefits that the union negotiated. They accepted these improvements and never objected to paying the related fees," AFSCME Council 31 Public Affairs Director Anders Lindall told reporters covering the case.

"The anti-worker, corporate-funded front groups prolonging this failed litigation want to use the courts to further their political attack on working people and our union. Their repeated lawsuits are nothing but a greedy grab for more."

Union members fighting back

AFSCME members and retirees aren't taking these assaults lying down. They're fighting back by becoming stronger than ever.

"AFSCME members can help defeat the IPI's game plan by signing an AFSCME Strong card today," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said.

"Let's continue to build a strong union and lead the fight for fairness for all public-service workers." 

COUNCIL 31 SEEKS NOMINATIONS FOR 2019 PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

Nearly every workplace has someone who goes the extra mile to give top-quality public service, day in and day out. There are also those who step up at a moment of crisis or even save lives when disaster threatens.

Now it's time to recognize that kind of dedication to public service. Nominations are open for the AFSCME Council 31 Public Service Award, which will be presented at the Council 31 21st Biennial Convention in Springfield this October 18 - 19.

COUNCIL 31 PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Name of AFSCME member nominated: _____

The nominee is a member of AFSCME Local # _____

Name of AFSCME member making the nomination: _____

Your phone number: (W) _____ (H) _____

Signature: _____ Local # _____

Send a completed form by mail, email or fax to Maggie Walker, along with a page (or more) describing why the nominee should receive the Public Service Award for outstanding public service.

MAIL: Maggie Walker, AFSCME Council 31, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 2100, Chicago IL 60601

EMAIL: mwalker@afscme31.org

NOMINATIONS ARE DUE SEPTEMBER 15

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Local 3966 bargaining team members Kristin Johnson (left) and Nora Arch of the Kane County Health Department.

AFSCME members win Kane County battle

KANE COUNTY BOARD CHAIR Chris Lauzen took a page out of Bruce Rauner's playbook, trying—and failing—to thwart AFSCME members' ability to negotiate a fair contract in good faith.

AFSCME Local 3966 had settled a four-year agreement with Kane County that included annual 2% cost-of-living increases and locked in health insurance costs for the duration of the contract. The county board unanimously ratified the agreement and union members ratified it as well.

But then, shockingly, Lauzen refused to sign it. Instead, he said there was an error made in the negotiated terms and directed everyone to come back to the table.

But AFSCME refused to go back, and the law backed the union up.

"Lauzen thought we'd come crawling back to the table," AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Lange said. "But he was wrong."

Local 3966 members at Kane County work in various offices and departments. Two-thirds of the 150-member local—those at the chief judge's office and the circuit clerk's office—saw their contracts signed because those offices don't require the board chair's approval. But Lauzen was able to stall the health department, the

county clerk's office and the workforce development program.

Lauzen told the public that the county had somehow not realized what it agreed to in the contract settlement.

"With our union we're able to fight back. We don't let anyone just step over us."

"We were frustrated, and we were kind of numb," bargaining committee member and health department employee Nora Arch said. "We should have been working together and instead he's lying and dragging us through the mud."

The union fought back, refusing to renegotiate already settled terms and filing unfair labor practice charges against the county.

The sticking point for Lauzen was the 2% raise provided to employees in each year of the contract—yet he supported passage of a 2% increase for non-union employees.

"We're underpaid and weren't asking for much," Arch said. "But that extra two percent means a lot for a county employee that makes less than \$60,000 a year. So we needed to fight for it."

During the widely

publicized conflict, Kane County States Attorney Joseph McMahon intervened on the side of truth and fairness.

McMahon issued a 48-page memo proving Lauzen knew what was happening and advised the chair that he would lose if this matter went to hearing.

Other unions agreed to return to the table and lost ground as a result. In the

end, Lauzen relented, and AFSCME members got the terms that the county originally agreed to and ratified.

"If we didn't have a union, we wouldn't have had a leg to stand on," Arch said. "But with our union we're able to fight back. That's what it means to be united and union strong. We don't let anyone just step over us."

Lange led negotiations for Local 3966 along with Arch, Kristin Johnson, Diane Dawson, Alexis Katzenbach, Amy Lantis, Cheryl Kane, Deb Ruchti, Jim Morefield, Lauren Behnke, Alicia Gutierrez and Jacqueline Erves-Carter. Their contract expires November 30, 2021.

"We won a lot of things that will ensure staff turnover stops disrupting resident care."

increases ranging from 6% to 25%—an average of 12% in less than two years—plus shift differentials, incentives and longevity pay. All employees will receive more paid time off, with part-time employees getting that benefit for the first time.

But the direct service personnel (DSPs) at this private community agency for adult men with developmental disabilities always cared about more than better pay.

"We won a lot of things that will be good for the residents and ensure staff turnover stops disrupting their care," bargaining team member and DSP Rosie Schmalz said.

She said wage increases and better benefits will improve hiring and retention, and a safety committee and extra training for new employees will improve services.

Good Shepherd employees win first union contract

AFTER MORE THAN THREE years of persistence, employees at Good Shepherd Manor in Momence signed their first union contract, securing raises, improved benefits, and the rights and protections only a union can provide.

The team secured wage



Good Shepherd bargaining team: Leo Hunt Sr. and Dr. Leonard Porter (front); Rosie Schmalz, JoAnne Norwood, Jackie Springer (middle); David Dorn and Amelia Pope (back).

Making improvements for both employees and residents is why Good Shepherd's housekeepers, clerical workers, DSPs, maintenance workers, food service workers, transporters and health care providers organized a union in 2015.

After years of trying to work collaboratively with administrators, frontline employees were frustrated by the lack of respect for their input.

"We know the residents' mood swings, we know their needs and behaviors, but management wouldn't listen to us," Schmalz recalled. "We knew a union was the only way it was going to happen."

Despite their coercive tactics to quash the union organizing effort, management at Good Shepherd was surprised at how many staff were on board when employees voted to join AFSCME. The new union members are fighters, and extremely proud of their first contract.

Asked how it felt to finally sit across the table from management and make a deal, Schmalz said: "It felt absolutely spectacular."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative David Dorn and included Schmalz, Amelia Pope, Jackie Springer, JoAnne Norwood and Leo Hunt. Good Shepherd employees joined AFSCME Local 893, which includes employees from neighboring Kankakee County Training Center and Indian Oaks Academy.

Willowglen inks first union contract

NEARLY 100 EMPLOYEES AT Willowglen Academy in Freeport settled their first union contract in May, just months after becoming part of AFSCME.

Sometimes first contracts can take exceptionally long to achieve, as employers have often vehemently opposed employees' forming a union. But the unity and determination of Willowglen employees compelled management—who was seeking to sell the facility—to make a fair deal.

Direct service personnel (DSPs), paraeducators, food service and maintenance employees at the nonprofit



Chelsea Kruger of Willowglen Academy educates lawmakers about the importance of fair pay for disability and youth care workers.

"We can make a difference and that's the best feeling ever."

facility for children and adults with developmental disabilities now look forward to a much brighter future.

"I feel great about being part of AFSCME," bargaining committee member Chelsea Kruger said. "We can make a difference and that's the best feeling ever. We're already making our voice heard, not just with management but with legislators. The people we serve don't have a voice, or it's very limited, so we need to be their voice."

In May, Kruger and others from the new AFSCME unit joined fellow DSPs from across Illinois in Springfield at the union DSP and Youth Care Lobby Day to urge legislators to support fair pay for frontline workers in state-funded direct-care agencies. These new union members will benefit from the bump in state funding in the new state budget.

AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner led negotiations for the new unit, which will join in Local 2399 with members at the Stephenson County Nursing Center. Kruger was on the team, along with Rakeya McClain, Andy Miller, Carrie Lott, Lizette Green and Marshay Booker.

Together they won a two-year agreement with hourly increases for every position in the first year and a 3%

across-the-board increase in the second year, plus shift differentials, improved paid time off and a ratification bonus.

For the first time, Willowglen employees have labor-management meetings, union orientation, time off for

union activities, paid steward training, a grievance procedure and seniority rights. Plus the contract includes successor language so the achievements they won are protected under new ownership.

Kruger is the first certified steward for her building, but she looks forward to helping train additional stewards to advocate for employees and patients alike.

"There were so many issues we felt weren't being

addressed by management," Kruger said. "The lack of pay, the long hours, it was all affecting the quality of care for our clients and the quality of our own lives."

That's why Willowglen employees united together, to make things better for themselves and the people they serve.

"It's incredible," Kruger said of the changes they've made already. "It feels like we're changing the world."

AFSCME Free College: A Great Opportunity

Union members and their families can earn an Associate Degree with no out-of-pocket costs.

Through a partnership between AFSCME and Eastern Gateway Community College, AFSCME members and their children (or stepchildren), grandchildren (or step-grandchildren), spouses, domestic partners, siblings, parents and financial dependents are eligible for a Free College Benefit to earn an Associate Degree online—for free!

There are a variety of courses of study available, including Health Care Management, Labor, Criminal Justice, Accounting and Early Childhood Education. Students can focus on labor studies, programming, cyber security, finance, marketing, human resources and more.

And any corrections employee who graduated from the State of Illinois Department of Corrections Training Academy and chooses the Eastern Gateway Criminal Justice program can leapfrog into their education and complete their associate degree in criminal justice in less than 18 months. DOC employees can also earn up to 19 college credits with their Training Academy Certificate.

Students can set their class schedule around work and personal life for access to greater opportunities, including better pay and promotions. Credits earned can transfer to other colleges.

Eastern Gateway Community College is a public, accredited college in the university system of Ohio, which is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commissioner.

**For complete application information, call 888-590-9009
or visit FreeCollege.AFSCME.org**

“What AFSCME has meant to our family”



“My mom will always have an unbreakable community of public service workers backing her up.”

Diego Andrade-Cabrera, the son of AFSCME Local 2854 member Doris Andrade, has been awarded a 2019 AFSCME Family Scholarship because of his excellent academic and extracurricular achievements at Albert G. Lane Technical High School in Chicago. This is an excerpt from his application essay.

“2014 was a life-changing time for my mother and me. She unexpectedly lost her job in November of 2013. A couple months passed, and she still could not find suitable employment. She spent her days filling out countless job applications, contacting companies, and even volunteering for non-profit organizations.

“I was starting to feel some of her desperation once we passed the six-month mark of no income. My mom seemed very anxious, even though she tried to hide it. She had exhausted all her options and she was running out of money to pay the mortgage of our house.

“On June 27, 2014, after eight months of dreadful waiting, my mom received a phone call that would impact our lives forever. Immediately after she got off the phone, I recall her jumping with joy and squealing with excitement. She exclaimed that she accepted a position to work for the Illinois Department of Human Services. She was ecstatic.

“Her position came with critical benefits that would allow her to work without worrying about saving for retirement, taking sick days, suffering from pay-cuts, utilizing vacation days, affordable health insurance, and much more. I now realize that all that

is possible because she benefits from the accomplishments of a union. As soon as my mom began her new job, she joined the local union because she understands that workers must support their unions in order to preserve the benefits they have.

“Thanks to AFSCME, my mother has the benefits she needs to help me succeed. She can call off work to take me to medical appointments, she has breaks during her workday to check up on me, and she took time off to meet every single teacher during my time in high school.

“It means a lot to me knowing that my mother will support me. Her undying support is only possible because her union has battled for workers’ benefits. Being a part of the AFSCME means that my family has a support network that ensures my mom will always have an unbreakable community of public service workers backing her up.

“AFSCME has taught my family a life lesson: Fight for what you believe in and don’t stop until you achieve it.”

2019 Larry Marquardt College Scholarship winners

Children of AFSCME members or retirees who are high school seniors or college students under the age of 25 — as well as members in good standing who plan to attend school full-time — are eligible to apply for AFSCME Council 31’s annual Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

The \$2,000 scholarship honors the first executive director of Council 31 and a tireless union organizer.

This year’s Marquardt scholarship winners are Olivia Streeter and Victoria Revolinski. Congratulations to all our 2019 applicants, and good luck.

Olivia Streeter

Olivia Streeter graduated from Peoria High School and

is headed to Illinois State University. She is the daughter of AFSCME Sub-Chapter 78 Retiree Debra Streeter.

“I have enjoyed the benefits of a life that AFSCME helped my mother to provide. While many women make less than their male counterparts in non-union jobs, AFSCME contracts ensured my mother earned the same wage as men in her position.

“My grandmother worked difficult jobs for long hours

for very little pay because she didn’t have the opportunity to join a union. In just one generation, union benefits helped her daughter earn a pension and a college degree.

“With a college degree in communications, I hope to help people understand that without unions, working conditions would deteriorate and the works of past generations of men and women to get us to this point would be lost.”*

Victoria Revolinski

Victoria Revolinski graduated from Anna Jonesboro High School and will attend Shawnee Community College. She is the daughter of AFSCME Local 141 member Douglas Revolinski.

“When Bruce Rauner was elected governor of Illinois, one of [his] goals was to bust the unions. Well, he tried,



This year’s winners: Olivia Streeter (left) and Victoria Revolinski



To learn more about scholarship opportunities for AFSCME members, retirees and their children, visit AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships

but it seems to have made people come together and make unions stronger.

“Unions fought for—and work to strengthen—many things we take for granted. My dad works at Choate Mental Health Center. His benefits include vacation, sick and personal time, health insurance and retirement. Those are the most important benefits, but there are more. My dad’s union

fights for him.

“Unions have a tough battle ahead protecting the rights of the middle class. There are groups that attack the rights of workers. It’s a frightening situation. That’s why the labor movement is needed today more than ever.”*

*Excerpted from scholarship application essay.

RETIREE NOTES



Retirees from Sub-Chapter 59 gathered to support fair tax reform.

Chapter 31 members work to pass fair tax

THE FAIR TAX CONSTITUTIONAL amendment (SJRCA1) passed the Illinois General Assembly in May. The measure—which will raise \$3 billion in revenue by ensuring the wealthy pay their fair share—now heads to voters in the 2020 general election.

"Initially, many of my members had questions about the fair tax," said David Spinner, president of Sub-Chapter 87 which includes Christian, Macon, Moultrie, Shelby and Montgomery Counties. "As we began studying the issue, it quickly became clear that the fair tax is desperately needed to address the structural deficit and ensure the state can fully fund public pensions. That's why we worked to get it passed."

Sub-Chapter 87 wasn't alone. As retiree members learned the facts about the fair tax, more and more actively lobbied to pass the legislation by calling their lawmakers, educating other groups and taking part in actions.

Sub-Chapter 59 members, who live in Jersey, Madison, and St. Clair Counties, wanted clarification on the constitutional change before getting behind the reform.

"Folks here were relieved to learn that the fair tax would be pursued by a vote of the legislature and then voters, instead of a constitutional convention," Sub-Chapter 59 President Mike Miller said, "so only the language being voted on can be changed and our pension protections cannot be touched."

"We seniors have the advantage of memory," said Jim Dixon, member of Sub-Chapter 86 in Sangamon County. "We've seen decade after decade of the state unable to pay all of its bills, services and pension obligations due to a lack of revenue, and working people paying twice as much of their income in taxes as the wealthy."

AFSCME retirees will work to ensure voters approve the fair tax in November 2020.



Jo Coleman, Sub-Chapter 59.

At 93, nurse says stay active

"PEOPLE THINK BECAUSE you're 93, you're old and decrepit," Jo Coleman, a member of Sub-Chapter 59 near Alton, said as she mimicked a hunched-over walk. "It's really about having a positive attitude and staying active."

Coleman's nursing career spanned 72 years, including many years at Alton State Hospital, now called Alton Mental Health Center.

She first worked for more than 50 years, before retiring in

2001 at age 75. But that didn't last long. She began to work part-time at a local developmental training center, distributing medications to patients, and says she will continue working as long as she is able.

"While medicine has changed drastically over my career, one thing remains absolutely true," says Coleman. "Staying active is still one of the best ways for a person to stay healthy, both mentally and physically."

Social Security 2020 COLA

ACCORDING TO A NEW ESTIMATE based on the recent Social Security Trustees report, the projected Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for 2020 will be 1.8%. This is a full percentage point lower than 2019's 2.8% and amounts to an increase of only about \$26 in monthly benefits for the average claimant.

The same projection says that the Medicare Part B pre-

"The bottom line is seniors deserve a COLA increase."

for Retired Americans have been strong proponents of moving to a more accurate measure of inflation for seniors. Social Security's annual COLA is calculated using the CPI-W formula, based on spending habits of urban wage earners and clerical workers.

The Fair COLA for Seniors Act (H.R. 1553), introduced by U.S. Representative John Garamendi (CA-03), would use the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) for the purpose of determining the Social Security COLA. Using the CPI-E will ensure that benefits for retirees are not diminished by rising costs in the goods and services that seniors disproportionately consume.

"The bottom line is

It demonstrates the failure of the current COLA formula to accurately measures seniors' expenses, including higher out-of-pocket health care costs and housing expenses."

Retirees owed steps and longevity pay

RETIRÉ STATE WORKERS owed back pay for step and longevity increases withheld during Bruce Rauner's term in office will be receiving it along with current employees.

A top priority for Council 31 has been making employees—including those who've since retired—whole for wages lost as a result of Rauner's illegal step freeze. While those who were working were put back on their proper steps on April 1, Council 31 continued fighting to gain funding for the back wages owed to both active and retired employees. In June the General Assembly passed a budget to accomplish that goal.

Once back wages have been paid, the State Employees Retirement System (SERS) will begin the process of recalculating pensions and disability payments for those who were owed either steps or longevity pay.

SERS staff must manually review the back-wage records of several thousand retirees in order to calculate the impact of back wages on each retiree's monthly pension amount and to determine if a retroactive adjustment to the pension benefit is required. This process will take a considerable amount of time. The union will notify retiree chapter members of the specific time frame as soon as possible. 

Call your Member of Congress and urge them to support H.R. 1553—the Fair COLA for Seniors Act!



mium will likely rise by \$8.80 per month next year. If both estimates prove accurate, the average beneficiary will only receive a net increase of \$17.20 per month, which will quickly be eaten up by rising prescription drug costs and other expenses. AFSCME and the Alliance

that seniors deserve a COLA increase and relief on their wallets," AFSCME Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe said. "Yet next year's projected COLA means that millions of beneficiaries will once again find their expenses outpacing their Social Security benefit.



ON THE JOB

to see where we're at with hiring. We keep the county accountable.

When the jail opened, we had 203 officers for 800 inmates. Now we're at 153. That's not a viable functioning number. The county board just said we can go to 159, but that's just putting a Band-Aid on the problem.

Why is it important to be AFSCME Strong?

I've been the vice president of Local 473 for 12 years. I enjoy doing it. I try to talk to our younger generation. They don't understand their rights. I tell them, we have a pension, health insurance, seniority—but all that can all be gone in a moment.

Being union helps improve our pay and keeps our health insurance at a level we can afford.

But we're still underpaid compared to other comparable places, so the union did a 2008 job study. The county said they were broke and couldn't pay. But an arbitrator ruled that as soon as they hit some budget benchmarks, they must pay us more.

They never did—until the new sheriff realized they were just pushing money around and did have the funding to meet the job study. We all got raises retroactive to 2015 according to the arbitration ruling. We wouldn't have had that without the union.

What have you learned from your career in public safety?

Never take life for granted. I could be on the other side of that wall. I'm grateful I can go home to my family and kids each day. I

Michael Delgado

AFSCME Local 473

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER, WINNEBAGO COUNTY JAIL

Tell us about your job.

I've been a correctional officer for 14 years at the Winnebago County jail in Rockford. It's a two-tier facility for 800 inmates with a mental health unit, a medical unit and general housing.

Turnover is very high right now because we are extremely understaffed. We're often one officer for two pods of 64 inmates—that's more than 120 inmates. You're dealing with getting inmates to their attorney visits, court, classes, visiting hours, meals and medical services—all while trying to give them time out of their cells.

Working with the mentally ill inmates can be especially challenging. You can't let your guard down because they're dangerous, but we treat them as we would want to be treated.

It's sad. They're stuck in our system because our state and federal government has shut down what little services and housing programs we had for the mentally ill. If they get out, they often come back because they missed a court date or trespassed on private property because they have nowhere else to go.

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

I love my job. My mom was a nurse who took care of the elderly in nursing homes. My dad was a big union person. I actually enjoy going to work. But I don't enjoy seeing the inmates in there, wasting their lives away—sunny days, months and years passing them by.

I try to talk to them. I tell them, life's so short. If you think about it, we're only on this earth for a blink of a moment. If you're stuck in here, you can't leave if something goes

wrong. You can't see a sick or dying family member. I tell the gang members: You don't need that gang. They were there to help you get in trouble, but where are they now?

I also love going in and talking to the other officers, seeing how they're doing. We have a good team.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

We allow the public to sleep easy. The majority of our inmates are in for high crimes. We have people in for murder, rape, pedophiles, gun charges.

Sometimes I see former inmates, maybe at the grocery store when I'm out with my wife and kids, and they approach me. They say thank you. They say they remember our

"My two biggest hopes are that when they get out, the inmates don't come back. And that all our officers go home safe at the end of the day."

talks and they're holding onto it.

It's good to hear because hopefully that's one you can mark that doesn't come back into the system. They aren't committing crimes and the taxpayer doesn't have to pay.

How does the union improve services?

The union has been fighting to get our staffing numbers up. We've filed multiple grievances and we sit down with the sheriff and go over the numbers once a month

thank god that I'm where I'm at today.

I know there's a purpose in my life. I'm able to communicate to the people who are incarcerated. If they're having a bad day, I talk to them. I'm not a psychiatrist, but you have to talk to them and hope they can listen and understand. Hope that they can change.

We're in a tough job. My two biggest hopes are that when they get out, the inmates don't come back. And that all our officers are safe, that we go home safe at the end of the day to our families. 