We Won’t Back Down.

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A union members all across America face a new reality—a Supreme Court ruling in the Janus case that greatly strengthens the hand of the already rich and powerful—I find myself thinking back on the history of the labor movement in our country—of challenges overcome and of those who came before.

In particular, I’ve been thinking about four stalwart defenders of workers’ rights who we lost in the first half of this year—Paul Booth, Barbara Hillman, Ed Sadlowski and Gloria Arsenau.

Every one of us, no matter what we do in life, stands on the shoulders of someone who came before them who first cleared the ground we farm today, who wrote the score for the music we play, who fought on foreign shores so we farm today, who wrote the score for the music we play, who fought on foreign shores so we farm today. But they would not be deterred.

For working people in this country and across the globe, there are countless such someones—men and women who came together, despite fierce opposition, to assert their right to a decent standard of living and a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. By uniting to form unions, they sought to overcome the harsh, demeaning and unsafe conditions in which they labored.

Employers were against them. The law was against them. The press was against them. And too often the politicians were against them. Many lost their jobs, their income, their prospects; some lost their lives. But they would not be deterred.

It took nearly a century of struggle to enact the first federal laws that solidified fundamental workplace rights—and many decades more before those rights were extended to public employees through state laws.

I’ve been around long enough to recall when public employees in Illinois didn’t have the legal right to form a union and completely at the mercy of their employers. Over many years, state, city and county workers took direct action at their workplaces, made demands to bargain, and put pressure on decision makers, all to secure the basic right to be recognized as a union and bargain collectively.

It wasn’t until 1984 that Illinois public employees gained that right. In the years that followed, hundreds of thousands of them voted overwhelmingly to form unions at their workplaces.

That explosion of organizing transformed countless lives. Pensions that had been a pittance became the promised land for the future.

None of this progress happened by chance. It happened because of people like Paul, Barbara, Ed and Gloria. Before he moved to Washington, DC to work for the national union Paul Booth was a key strategist in laying the groundwork for the powerful force that AFSCME became in Illinois. Paul had the air of an absent-minded professor—piles of papers under his arm, tie askew, glasses low on his nose—but his mind was razor-sharp. He was a tireless organizer, laser-focused on improving the lives of working people.

Barbara Hillman was a pioneering woman labor lawyer. It’s fitting that she often represented the Steelworkers union, since she had a steely resolve that could cow even the most arrogant management-side attorneys. Barbara aided early efforts to forge Illinois collective bargaining laws, regulations, and judicial rulings that expanded the ability of public employees to have a say in the decisions that affect our working lives.

Ed Sadlowski, former leader of the Steelworkers in the Calumet region, was a powerful voice for economic justice who never backed down from any fight and stood up for workers everywhere. His fierce commitment to dignity for every worker influenced countless trade unionists all across the country.

Gloria Arsenau, longtime president of AFSCME Local 2794 in the Kanakee area, passed away just last month. A passionate union advocate for more than three decades, she served on the Council 31 Executive Board and on every state bargaining committee since 1972. Gloria studied for every fight. She was that person who came to every meeting, prepared the agenda, took the minutes, walked countless picket lines and never failed to respond to a member’s call for help.

During a five-year battle with ovarian cancer, Gloria’s strength, commitment and character emerged even more clearly. She never complained and she never quit.

Each of these lives has meaning for every one of us. Like countless others before them, these four dedicated trade unionists fought for the rights we have today.

The question for every union member now is this: Will we heedlessly surrender those rights to the likes of Bruce Rauner and his fellow billionaires who have fought to ban fair share fees in the hopes of driving decent wages, unions and bankrupting unions? I refuse to believe that we will. After coming this far, we won’t stop now. We’re going to stay united and stay strong so that our shoulders will someday be the ones that our children and grandchildren stand upon to forge their own better lives.
AFSCME PEOPLE Committee endorses Pritzker for governor

On April 27 the PEOPLE Executive Committee, comprised of AFSCME local union leaders from across the state, met in Springfield and voted unanimously to endorse J.B. Pritzker for governor and Juliana Stratton for lieutenant governor.

The vote furthers the commitment made by delegates to the AFSCME biennial convention in October who pledged to do whatever it takes to defeat Bruce Rauner in the November election. In January, hundreds of delegates to the AFSCME PEOPLE Conference voted to authorize the PEOPLE Executive Committee to make an early endorsement in the general election so that our union could immediately begin to lay the groundwork for the kind of grassroots voter outreach it will take to win in November.

Right to the point

When Pritzker appeared before the committee to present his views on a wide range of issues affecting public service workers in Illinois, the candidate provided thoughtful, in-depth answers to questions from committee members on topics such as protecting pension benefits, securing a contract for state employees, restoring funding to our state universities, raising the minimum wage and implementing a fair tax. Matt Lukow, president of AFSCME Local 1064 representing DOC and State Police employees in the greater Springfield area, asked Pritzker a question that’s on the minds of many state employees: Noting that Bruce Rauner walked out on state employees. Noting that’s on the minds of many of us to help ensure that he doesn’t succeed.”

“Rauner prides himself on his persistence, and there’s no doubt that he will do everything in his power to win in November. It will be up to all of us to help ensure that he doesn’t succeed.”

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A new course

“My honor to have the support of AFSCME and the tens of thousands of workers it represents in Illinois,” Pritzker said. “While Bruce Rauner undercut our work and attacks their families at every chance, I will restore the respect our public service workers deserve. I will defend collective bargaining rights for our unions and protect hard-earned pensions. With the support of AFSCME members throughout Illinois, we will put Springfield back on the side of working families.”

“Repairing the damage done by Bruce Rauner is a big job,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “Illinois needs leaders like J.B. Pritzker and Juliana Stratton who will bring people together and who care about working families. They’ve taken the time to travel the state and to listen to working people. They know the importance of public services and they value the women and men who provide those services in our communities every day. We look forward to working with them to rebuild our state.”

AFSCME members interested in volunteering to win this critical election can visit AFSCME31.org/Volunteer to sign up.

“Under Rauner we’ve had to fight just to get a living wage. He doesn’t understand the work we do and never walked in our shoes. We need leaders like J.B. Pritzker and Juliana Stratton who are compassionate enough to take the time to understand a single mother who works two jobs and still can’t make ends meet. We need leaders who are willing to stand up for what’s right and get the job done.”

—Yolanda Woods, Local 2481, Springfield

“Bruce Rauner starved universities, doing incalculable damage to university employees and the students we serve. We need a governor who will prioritize higher education. I know that J.B. Pritzker believes in funding public higher education and understands the important role it plays in our state.”

—Ellen Larrimore, Local 1989, Chicago

AFSCME local union leaders unanimously endorsed J.B. Pritzker for governor and Juliana Stratton for lieutenant governor.
Labor Board rejects Rauner on steps

AFSCME members won another important victory at the Labor Board this June in the long battle with Gov. Rauner over step increases.

In a June 12 hearing in Springfield, the state panel of the Illinois Labor Relations Board (ILRB) rejected the Rauner administration’s delay tactics, found that employees must be made whole, and sent the matter to a board compliance officer to determine a remedy.

“The labor board rightly rejected the Rauner administration’s delay tactics and made clear that the governor’s step freeze is wrong,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “Our union will keep doing everything possible to make sure that employees are placed on the correct step and made whole for the increases they’ve been denied.”

Since Rauner acted unilaterally to halt movement for state employees in the step plan in 2015, AFSCME has continued to battle in the courts to restore the frozen step increases.

AFSCME contends that employees should be made whole by being placed at the proper step and paid back wages for the steps missed. But the Rauner Administration has been trying to convince the Labor Board that there are no funds appropriated to cover the cost for this remedy.

In early May the Fifth District Appellate Court remanded AFSCME’s case challenging the Rauner Administration’s refusal to pay steps back to the ILRB for a remedy. The Appellate Court had found that Rauner was wrong to freeze movement in the state’s step plan and that the ILRB ruled wrongly in denying AFSCME’s Unfair Labor Practice charge against the Rauner administration regarding the freeze.

Un mocking in his efforts to drive down the income of state workers, Rauner then argued at the Labor Board against full restitution for employees. He sought to drag out the proceedings for as long as possible.

The labor board sided with the union, rejecting Rauner’s attempt to slow the proceedings down to a crawl. But even though the board rejected Rauner’s request for an extensive hearing process, it failed to take prompt attention to ensure that justice is done for employees.

Instead, the board will wait for its next scheduled meeting in July, when the board will formally refer the matter to a compliance officer. AFSCME will immediately petition for a make-whole remedy, and the compliance officer will then have 75 days to respond. They should act promptly to issue a final order in this case.

Community outreach workers join AFSCME

More than 100 workers at Erie House, a human services agency on Chicago’s west side, voted overwhelmingly to join AFSCME on May 2.

The National Labor Relations Board certified the election results on May 10. Now these new AFSCME members are preparing to bargain their first union contract.

An education and resource center serving the immigrant community, Erie House provides early childhood education and family support, along with adult and after-school programs.

About a year ago, Erie House workers reached out to AFSCME because they believed working conditions and services could improve if employees had more support and respect from management.

“We do everything we can for our participants. We go back and forth and up and down for them, but when it comes to the employees, it’s hard to find that support,” said Jose Frausto, a maintenance worker who has held multiple positions at the organization over the last 14 years.

“I was a participant at Erie House when I first came to this country about 19 years ago,” Frausto said. “They helped me learn English and understand more about living in the United States. I’m still working here because I want to help ensure that Erie House programs are available for the community just as they were for me back then.”

Workers need a voice

Frausto is married to Irene Marquez, a preschool teacher at Erie House. They are expecting their first baby. He says he, his wife and their co-workers know the organization from different perspectives but have similar concerns: the lack of resources and support to do their jobs.

For example, teachers don’t have enough time to cover classrooms and complete the paperwork required for grant funding. Without support and adequate staff, they feel overwhelmed, overworked and underpaid.

“Working for a community organization, we aren’t looking to become rich,” Frausto said. “We do this work from our heart, to help our community. But sometimes it feels that management takes advantage of that. We’re not asking for a lot of money, just a decent, living wage. We don’t even have that.”

But fair compensation is just one part of what Erie House employees want to achieve with their union. They want a voice in the decisions that impact them and the people they serve on a daily basis.

Management regularly creates new policies that directly affect employees’ work, but staff often find out about them after they have already been implemented. There isn’t enough transparency or collaboration with staff.

“As frontline employees, we are the ones who understand the community,” Frausto said. “Having our voice be part of the decisions will make Erie House a better place to work and a better place for those we serve.”

Staff at Erie House are ready for a union: “Having our voice be part of the decisions will make Erie House a better place to work and a better place for those we serve.”
After seven years, the state will finally pay its oldest debt—$63 million in back wages owed to more than 24,000 state employees.

Through legal battles and lobbying efforts spanning two administrations, AFSCME ensured the state complied with the law and that hard-working employees were paid what was rightfully theirs.

To make sure that every state employee received back pay owed since 2011 (an average of $2,400 each), AFSCME worked during the legislative session to pass a bill to pay the wages and for inclusion of funding in the negotiated 2019 budget plan adopted by the General Assembly.

“Public service workers earned these wages years ago. Finally paying what’s owed is not just morally right, it’s legally required,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “At long last there was strong bipartisan support for putting this matter to rest. Because of our tireless efforts, lawmakers agreed to pay the back wages, but that didn’t stop there. The Quinn Administration entered into a new contract with the union that addressed pay issues going forward but employees in Corrections, Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Natural Resources and Public Health were still owed back wages.

So AFSCME didn’t stop there. The union took the issue all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court, which ruled that the state must pay the back wages, but that doing so required a legislative appropriation. In 2014, the General Assembly passed an AFSCME-backed appropriation that funded approximately 45 percent of the back wages owed. And in 2016, the General Assembly passed a bill to pay the remaining wages owed—but Gov. Rauner vetoed it.

The battle for back pay

AFSCME will press for swift dispersal of funds to employees. The union won’t quit until every employee receives their money.

The back story

The back pay issue arose in July 2011 when the state failed to pay negotiated wage increases that the union had previously agreed to temporarily defer in light of fiscal challenges at the time. When the raises came due, Gov. Pat Quinn refused to pay them in 14 state agencies where CMS said there were inadequate appropriations.

AFSCME filed a grievance in response, which went before an independent arbitrator who found that the pay increase was owed and should be paid immediately. And on July 9, 2012 the circuit court upheld the arbitrator’s ruling in part, ordering the state to pay raises from any appropriations available.

After that ruling, raises were paid in full in many agencies.

That same year, the Quinn Administration entered into a new contract with the union that addressed pay issues going forward but employees in Corrections, Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Natural Resources and Public Health were still owed back wages.

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Making it happen in 2018

AFSCME members were ready to do whatever it took to ensure payment of the back wages in 2018. On May 10, more than 1,000 union members and retirees flooded the state Capitol to press legislators to finally pay the debt by passing House Bill 4290, sponsored by Rep. Jerry Costello. (Sen. Andy Manar sponsored companion legislation in the Senate.)

At a rally to kick off the lobbying effort, Logan Correctional Center sergeant and AFSCME Local 2073 president Shaun Dawson asked the crowd, "How is it that the money we are owed is so easily overlooked by the very government we serve? That the state has kicked this can down the road so many times shows blatant disrespect for the state employee workforce. We have done our jobs, gone to work every day and continued to serve. The state should uphold the same duty and pay what it owes.”

"At my facility alone, 75 percent of our members are owed a couple thousand dollars apiece,” said Dennis Williams, a mental health technician at Chicago-Read Mental Health Center and the president of AFSCME Local 1610. “Many of us are struggling with bills and living paycheck to paycheck. This money is ours. We deserve it because we worked for it.”

Legislators heard these stories and others at the Lobby Day. Just two weeks later, the bill passed the House of Representatives by an overwhelming vote of 98-10-1 on May 24. It passed the Senate with unanimous support on May 30.

The bill headed to Rauner’s desk. But before he had the chance to veto the veto-proof legislation, the governor signed the 2019 budget bill, which included adequate funding to pay the remaining back wages owed.

AFSCME will press for swift dispersal of funds to employees. The union won’t quit until every employee receives their money.
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Progress in 2018 legislative session

AFSCME Council 31’s legislative team racked up some significant wins for union members in the 2018 legislative session that came to a close May 31.

With the help of grassroots activism and legislative allies, AFSCME successfully built support for bills that improve job conditions and fairness for working families and blocked bills aimed at undercutting workers’ rights.

PASSED

State employee back pay

AFSCME led the charge to pass legislation needed to fund the remaining back pay still owed to more than 24,000 employees in six state agencies as a result of a negotiated wage increase that was withheld in 2011.

On May 10, more than 1,000 state employees turned out in Springfield to lobby for the appropriation. Their voices were heard. Two weeks later, on May 24, the House of Representatives passed HB 4290 by a veto-proof majority of 98-10-1. The Senate unanimously passed the bill on May 30.

As a fail-safe mechanism should the governor veto HB 4290 and slow down the payment of monies owed, AFSCME also pressed for inclusion of the back pay in the FY 2019 budget. Rauner signed that measure on June 4 and AFSCME is pressing CMS to pay what’s owed without delay.

AFSCME has been waging the battle for these funds in the courts and in the General Assembly for the past seven years. Employees in most agencies have already been paid in full. In addition, the union won passage of an appropriation in 2014 that secure half the funds for employees in DHS, DOC, DJJ, DNR and DPH. Now those employees will receive the remainder of what they’ve owed.

Rep. Jerry Costello was the House sponsor and Sen. Andy Manar the Senate sponsor of HB 4290. Both were tireless champions on this issue.

PASSED

Fair wages for DSPs

After winning a 75-cent per hour wage increase for direct support personnel (DSPs) in state-funded disability agencies last year, AFSCME members stepped up their campaign to increase base wages for DSPs in the state budget. The FY 2019 budget includes funding to provide for an average 50-cent-an-hour increase in compensation for community disability agency staff in the coming year. The budget language allows agencies funded by school districts to bill for the additional 50 cents as well.

This is not the pay increase that DSPs need and deserve, but it is another important step in the right direction and a particularly remarkable achievement in a time of fiscal belt-tightening. AFSCME members led the way in putting a human face on the problem of low wages and high turnover among DSPs through phone calls, postcards and visits with legislators to share their story of caring and hardship.

PASSED

Workplace safety reporting

Aimed at focusing greater public attention on the risks that thousands of employees in state government face on the job, SB 3075 passed both houses of the General Assembly with unanimous votes (despite opposition from the Department of Juvenile Justice) and is on its way to the governor’s desk.

Continued on next page
Illinois has a budget, on time and without Rauner’s demands

For the first time since taking office, Gov. Rauner signed a full budget. He did so June 4 after the General Assembly adopted it with strong bipartisan support on May 31.

His hand weakened by near defeat in the March primary, the governor was conspicuously absent from budget talks in the final weeks of session—a big change from the previous three years when his anti-worker demands prevented legislators from funding the state’s needs.

Last year, some Republican legislators broke with the governor and supported a necessary income tax increase, ending Rauner’s two-year grip on the budget process. That funding was key to ensuring a fully funded budget again this year.

While not perfect, the budget that starts this July includes key pieces of funding important to AFSCME members and working families, including:

- Remaining back pay owed (some $63 million) to 24,000 state employees since 2011;
- Raises for direct support personnel at state-funded disability agencies (50 cents an hour);
- Two percent funding increase for cash-strapped state universities;
- Partial restoration of cuts to local governments (from 10 percent cut to a five-percent cut);
- Hikes state payments to school districts by $350 million;
- Capital funding to rebuild Quincy Veterans Home as a state-operated facility; and
- Full funding for the state employee group health plan, preventing another accumulation of unpaid medical bills.

While there were some reductions to personal service (salary) lines for state employees, the cut is not deep enough to indicate layoffs. But it will be another lean staffing year.

The budget also establishes a voluntary option for Tier I participants in SERS, SERS and TRS to receive a cash payment at retirement in return for accepting a lower cost-of-living increase over their retirement years.

AFSCME will soon be sending members a complete summary of the new law along with information as to how taking that option would impact retirement security.

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LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Continued from previous page

Workplace safety is a crucial issue, yet too many state agencies see no urgency to address the growing problem of assaults on employees. That’s why AFSCME initiated this legislation, which will require DCFS, DHS, DOC and DJJ to make regular, comprehensive reports to the Illinois General Assembly.

In both DOC and DJJ, a review of available data shows that assaults by inmates and youth on employees increased more than 50 percent since 2015. In DHS facilities, especially state mental health centers, assaults on staff are reported to be occurring with much greater frequency and much more serious injuries. And as a result of the murder of DCFS investigator Pam Knight, there is now growing awareness of the dangers that DCFS employees face on the job every day.

PROGRESS Fair income tax

Republican lawmakers blocked passage of a constitutional amendment allowing for a fair income tax with lower rates for lower income taxpayers and higher rates for those with higher incomes, long one of AFSCME’s priorities.

Despite widespread public support for a fairer tax structure in Illinois, voters can’t have a say unless both the House and Senate approve resolutions to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot—SB 2680 and HB 4196, sponsored by Rep. Tom Bennett, which would have repealed a law that AFSCME helped pass to prevent privatization of non-instructional school services currently being performed by public employees without first meeting rigorous accountability standards. Bennett’s bill would have taken down any roadblocks to privatization, reduced the notification of layoffs and allowed schools to make changes simply to cut wages and benefits for employees.

AFSCME successfully stopped a bill (HB 5644) sponsored by Rep. Jeanne Ives that would have allowed municipalities to circumvent collective bargaining agreements and pension obligations by claiming bankruptcy due to financial deficits.

AFSCME helped block HB 4196, sponsored by Rep. Tom Bennett, which would have repealed a law that AFSCME helped pass to prevent privatization of non-instructional school services currently being performed by public employees without first meeting rigorous accountability standards. Bennett’s bill would have taken down any roadblocks to privatization, reduced the notification of layoffs and allowed schools to make changes simply to cut wages and benefits for employees.

AFSCME also blocked an effort (Senate Amendment 1 to SB 2680) by Sen. Bill Brady to strip workers’ rights to negotiate health care benefits and allow Gov. Rauner to set employee health care premiums based on the devastating terms he has been trying to impose.

BARGAINING

AFSCME successfully blocked a number of anti-worker bills with several different goals, including:

- Removing public service administrators from the state employee bargaining unit;
- Creating a state right-to-work for-less act;
- Making the ethics act preempmt any collective bargaining agreement or personnel code;
- Limiting required topics of bargaining to employee wages only; and
- Requiring local governments to publicly post contracts before they can be ratified.

AFSCME also blocked an anti-collective bargaining law that DCFS employees face on the job every day.

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Supreme Court Rules Against Workers in Janus Case

The US Supreme Court sided with the anti-worker forces behind Janus v. AFSCME Council 31 on June 27. In holding that fair-share fees in the public sector violate the First Amendment of the Constitution, the court’s majority made a decision based solely on politics, not on the true meaning of our country’s founding document.

“This case is a blatant political attack by Bruce Rauner and other wealthy interests on the freedom of working people to form strong unions,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “We are extremely disappointed the Supreme Court has taken the side of the powerful few, but we’re more determined than ever to keep our union strong, standing up for public services and the working people who provide them.”

Who’s pulling the strings

Originally filed by billionaire Republican Gov. Rauner, the case was taken up by the National Right-to-Work Foundation and the litigation arm of the Illinois Policy Institute, a Rauner-backed group whose national parent—the State Policy Network—said its intent in bringing the case was to “defund” the labor movement nationwide.

This decision proves that America needs unions now more than ever to fix a democracy and economy rigged in favor of the wealthy and powerful.

“The powerful interests behind this case have tens of millions of dollars to pour into their political agenda of trying to silence us,” Lynch said. “But we’re not going to let that happen. We’re making certain that every union member knows the real intent of this case is to defund unions, then drive down wages and benefits of public service workers. We aren’t afraid and we aren’t going anywhere.”

No court case will stop us

Unions are the most effective vehicle for working people to negotiate a fair return on our work; our strength in numbers gives us power.

That’s why the forces behind the lawsuit are waging an aggressive campaign to get employees who are currently members to drop out of the union. But no court case, and no amount of wealth and power, can stop our movement. Working people are more resolved than ever to stick together and fight back against any attacks that attempt to divide us.

The Union Difference

It Pays to Be Union! 100%

Better Pay
UNION MEMBERS EARN 25% MORE THAN THOSE NOT IN A UNION

Secure Retirement
76% OF UNION MEMBERS HAVE PENSION PLANS

Job Security
UNION MEMBERS HAVE DUE PROCESS RIGHTS THAT PROTECT THEM FROM WRONGFUL TERMINATION

People take for granted things we didn’t always have—our insurance, retirement, time off, grievances. Without a union we would be at the mercy of our bosses.

– Nancy Anderson
LaSalle County Nursing Home
Their union was against

Stay AFSCME strong

AFSCME is Bruce Rauner’s and IPI’s number one target in their union-destuction scheme. That’s why local unions all across Illinois are getting ready for the attack we know is coming. We need to stick together, fight back and stay union!

✔ Only through our union will we have the strength to stand up to our employer to protect and improve our pay, our health care, our pensions and our rights on the job.

✔ Because everyone benefits from the union contract, everyone should contribute to the costs of negotiating and enforcing the contract.

✔ Being part of a union means standing together with your co-workers to make things better for everyone.

✔ Make sure you’re a union member. Sign your AFSCME Strong card today!

They want to weaken our union. We are not going to let that happen. We’re going to fight for what’s right for our families and our communities.

– Jose Prado
Stateville Correctional Center

I call the people behind this case nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing. They just want to be able to strip away our rights.

– Christina Loudermilk
City of Rockford

With the union we get respect for the work that we do. The strength of a union is in its numbers. When our backs are to the wall, we stand together. We won’t quit.

– Keith Kracht
Centralia Correctional Center
Ilissa Keoughan is a Juvenile Justice Specialist with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. She works at the Illinois Youth Center at Harrisburg and is a member of AFSCME Local 779. This story is in her own words.

I’m just like the next middle-class mother, trying to provide her children with a comfortable life. But if you live in Southern Illinois you are aware there is not a huge abundance of high-paying jobs with good family benefits.

I had worked as a substance abuse counselor, a GED instructor at our community college, and coached youth sports in our community for a number of years—none of which provided an income adequate for a family of five. So when I came across the position of Juvenile Justice Specialist, which described developing rapport with incarcerated youths, aiding in their rehabilitation, etc., at a starting salary of $52,000, it sounded like a dream come true.

Specialist, which described for comments. Our only position of Juvenile Justice [defense is to write up] Youth Disciplinary Reports, which are usually not responded to by administration. A youth “may” receive two days of curfew, which means they must go into their rooms an hour or so earlier than normal for two nights.

In February 2018, I was placed on the substance abuse program unit. I should have felt at home, since I used to work as a substance abuse counselor; however, this is not your typical substance abuse program. None of the youths take it seriously; they just see it as a way to be released early. A common practice is to place youths in the program who had been acting up on other units. (The result is a volatile mix of different ages and issues.)

A month after I started, we received two new youths, a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old. I instantly noticed the 17-year-old preying on the weaker, younger youths on the unit. I began writing him up because he got out of his room the next day he was going to “get that [expletive] Keoughan” and that I was going to be gone when he was done with me—all of which I reported.

Our superintendent approved only two days of curfew for the threats. On March 20 a male intern and I were escorting 21 youths from breakfast back to the unit (the youth to staff ratio is supposed to be 8:1), and we came to an area that was out of the view of any cameras.

The 15-year-old youth suddenly jumped out of line and struck me in the side of the head with a closed fist. This strike threw me off balance as I attempted to reach for my radio and shield myself from another strike. The youth struck me once again in the forehead, which caused me to lose my footing and fall to the ground.

After I was knocked to the ground, the youth jumped on top of me and continued punching me with closed fists in the face and head. All of a sudden, one of the other youths from the unit pulled the attacking youth off of me and began fighting him. This youth earned my gratitude for his actions that day.

I had a bloody nose, my ear was on fire, and my entire head was aching all over. A fellow staffer transported me to the ER.

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I had a bloody nose, my ear was on fire, and my entire head was aching all over. A fellow staffer transported me to the ER, where my husband later picked me up. I was flooded with texts and calls from co-workers checking on me, which made me feel very supported. Our administration, however, was concerned with finding the previous tickets I had written that were denied, to keep themselves out of hot water.

I learned that next day that the 15-year-old admitted the 17-year-old had “paid” him to attack me because they knew he wouldn’t get any adult charges. They also planned the attack right where they knew cameras were not on.

Our discipline team requested one year of “set time” [which delays access to the parole board] for the youth who attacked me. Our superintendent approved six months. The older youth who paid this youth to attack me received no consequences.

I’m not sure I can stay with the department, for my own personal safety and mental health, but I will continue to hope for change for every single Juvenile Justice Specialist who works there.
Residents at Chester are largely people found not guilty of crimes by reason of insanity or mentally unfit to stand criminal trial. As the only maximum-security psychiatric hospital in the state, its patients can be extremely challenging and volatile.

In April 2016, a patient entered a restricted area where Klingeman was on duty and refused to leave, becoming violent. “He came at me with a closed fist and we both fell to the floor,” Klingeman recalled. The patient was put into restraints by staff, and the day resumed for Klingeman and the other staff.

But the next day Klingeman was told he was to report to the control center, a glass enclosure where workers have no contact with residents, pending investigation of the previous day’s incident.

Wrongly accused

Violence at CHMC is not uncommon and AFSCME members who work there are often wrongly accused of abusing residents. AFSCME grieves such wrongful discipline, and has prevailed in all 17 such cases in the last year.

For employees, the process can be extremely trying. Even if the employer’s investigation is ongoing, workers are typically terminated after 30 to 60 days of suspension. They can expect to be unemployed for weeks or even months.

Klingeman’s case dragged out for two years. After being told he would be assigned to the control center for 60 days before being terminated, Klingeman kept his job for more than a year before he officially lost his position. It was almost another year before he got it back.

Four months after the incident, Klingeman faced criminal charges and was interviewed by the state police. “The police report said I shouldn’t be charged and that the case was absurd,” Klingeman said.

For months after Klingeman was cleared of any criminal charges, the Office of the Inspector General sent Klingeman a certified letter informing him he was terminated.

He knew that co-workers who had been terminated unjustly were denied unemploy benefits so he immediately sought other work. “I have a little boy, so I didn’t want to take any chances,” he said. And it’s a good thing he didn’t. Klingeman was unemployed for almost a year as the state’s investigation plodded along.

Union strong

DHS does not replace suspended or terminated staff with pending investigations but instead covers their positions with mandatory and volunteer overtime.

One reason staff aren’t replaced may be the fact that most get their jobs back. Klingeman was no exception. AFSCME took his grievance to arbitration and just two weeks after the arbitration hearing on March 20, the arbitrator issued a ruling in his favor.

“The arbitrator said my case was one of the most outrageous cases she’s ever heard,” Klingeman remembered. “She ordered the state to put me back to work immediately and make me 100 percent whole.”

For Klingeman, the good news was a huge relief. To make him whole, Klingeman was given back pay for the many months after his termination, plus all holidays, vacation and sick leave he would have accrued during that time.

“If it wasn’t for our union, I wouldn’t be here.”

Klingeman was given back pay for the many months after his termination, plus all holidays, vacation and sick leave he would have accrued during that time. “It’s awesome to be back at Chester,” Klingeman effused. “If it wasn’t for our union, I wouldn’t be here.” He had high praise for his local union president, Randy Clover, and Council 31 Staff Representative Ty Petersen, who worked tirelessly to get him back, along with the other local officers. Klingeman also cited Council 31 attorney Sue Osthus who handled his case. “Sue was magnificent. She did not back down.”

Working at Chester is a tough job because there’s so little support from management, said Klingeman. But he stays on because he knows he’s making a difference. “I love when I can help a patient,” he said. “When I hear they are out there getting a job, on the proper medication and doing well for themselves, that feels really good.”

And Klingeman finds strength in his union. “I enjoy my union brothers and sisters. We have a good camaraderie. We have an awesome union. I am 1,000 percent pleased.”

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Jason Klingeman—and his union—didn’t give up fighting for his job so he could provide for his son.
ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Hundreds of NIU employees finally celebrate

"Having a union gives us the freedom to work in a safe and nonthreatening work environment."

After working for more than seven years without a raise—and without a voice—more than 600 clerical, technical, paraprofessional and administrative workers at Northern Illinois University decided to form a union with AFSCME two years ago.

Now the members of AFSCME Local 1890 have won their first union contract.

NIU management didn’t make it easy. A federal mediator was ultimately engaged. The only person the university sent to negotiate with employees had no experience with labor relations or bargaining.

“I found that so disrespectful,” local president and bargaining team member Laura Harris said.

Unfortunately, employees say, disrespect is a theme in the way the university has dealt with them over time. Harris said the “appalling” behavior of higher-ups—including verbal abuse and discrimination—was left unchecked by management.

“People deserve respect and dignity in the workplace,” said Harris, an office manager in the College of Early Education. “We all want to earn livable wages and come to work without feeling dread. We should feel good coming to work and making a difference, not discriminated against and downtrodden.”

Harris said that the fact that she and her co-workers deserve better treatment is what has kept her going during the more than two-year contract fight.

“Having a union gives us the freedom to work in a safe and nonthreatening work environment,” Harris said. “Before, everybody was scared of retaliation if they spoke up. Now that we’re protected, it’s not going to be swept under the rug. NIU is going to be held accountable.”

Dozens of Local 1890 members made up the bargaining committee, which was led by local president Laura Harris and AFSCME Council Staff Representative Sara Dorner.

Despite the challenges—including extreme fiscal constraints due to Gov. Rauner’s budget crisis and cuts to university funding—these new AFSCME members successfully secured a five-and-a-half year contract after more than a year of negotiations. The agreement provides real gains in wages, improves benefits and strengthens workplace protections, all enforceable through a grievance process that ends in legally binding arbitration.

“We decided to unionize because we were underpaid compared to other counties,” said Nick Hayes, a probation officer for 10 years at the county. “We felt our wages were unfair, especially because new hires were being paid the same as employees with 10 years of seniority. “I can confidently say that nobody in this office chose this career to get rich. But we do want to be compensated fairly, to be able to feed our families and go home to live a comfortable life. We want to be able to concentrate on the one job we have and not have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet.”

The contract significantly increases starting wages for legal support staff and probation officers, rewards and encourages longevity by increasing base salaries, and raises wages in each year of the contract by 2.75 percent or $0.70 an hour, whichever is greater. Employees can earn additional increases for positive performance reviews. And union members will now have more choices when it comes to their health insurance plans.

“Now that we’re unionized, management respects our voice,” Hayes said. “We might not always agree, but we have a seat at the table.”

The contract also institutes a “just-cause standard” for discipline—meaning management must prove their case to issue discipline, which must be progressively and corrective in nature—as well as a grievance procedure, labor-management meetings and layoff and recall rights.

“It’s a high-stress job that you can’t leave at the door when you get home,” Hayes said. “Despite our critical role in community safety by ensuring that convicted felons aren’t committing new crimes, we are under-appreciated and underpaid.”

“But at the end of the day, our work is motivating,” Hayes said. “Whether they made a one-time mistake or a lifetime of mistakes, if given the right tools and opportunities the people we help have the power to make positive changes in their lives. It’s inspiring.”

More than wages, the NIU workers are happy to win rights and protections on the job that they have never had before, like a grievance procedure and time off to represent members.

“Moving forward, we’re going to concentrate on enforcing our contract and ensuring that our members are not afraid to speak up if their rights are being violated,” Harris said. “We know NIU will push the envelope but now we have a legally binding agreement to protect us.”

McHenry County probation department wins first union contract

Employees of McHenry County’s probation department, members of AFSCME Local 1748, secured their first union contract after more than a year of negotiations. The agreement includes a one-time nine-percent raise over the first three years of the agreement; there are wage reopeners in the final two years. The unit also agrees to accept whatever health insurance terms the AFSCME bargaining team secures.

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Despite the challenges—including extreme fiscal constraints due to Gov. Rauner’s budget crisis and cuts to university funding—these new AFSCME members successfully secured a five-and-a-half year contract. Employees will receive a nine-percent raise over the first two years of the agreement; there are wage reopeners in the final two years. The unit agreed to accept whatever health insurance terms the AFSCME state bargaining team secures.

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SHORT REPORTS

 Teacher strikes show strength of collective action

In the last several months, teachers in five states have walked off the job—striking for fair pay and adequate education funding for their students, classrooms and schools. The strikes began in February with teachers in West Virginia. Two weeks later the governor signed into law a five percent pay raise.

After teachers went on strike in Kentucky, the legislature approved a significant increase to education funding. In Oklahoma, legislators responded to the teachers’ strike with a boost in educating funding and teacher salaries. Teachers in Colorado went on strike for five days and won wage increases and lower health care premiums. And Arizona teachers, among the lowest paid in the country, walked out for five days and won a nearly 20 percent raise over a three-year contract.

The message of each strike was broader than working conditions at a particular school; these teachers were urging better salaries not just for teachers but for all school employees as well as better funding for public education to ensure that every child receives a high-quality education.

Teacher salaries in the United States are effectively five percent lower than they were just a decade ago while retirement contributions and health insurance premiums have increased. The states that are home to these strikes have consistently cut public services and slashed spending on schools.

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Children of AFSCME members win scholarships

Union membership helps workers build a better future for their families. AFSCME members and their families also benefit from annual scholarship opportunities to pursue their education goals.

Five children of AFSCME Council 31 members won college scholarships this spring. These opportunities and others are available to AFSCME members and their immediate families. Visit AFSCME31.org/Union-Scholarships for more information.

Larry Marquardt Scholarship Winners

AFSCME Council 31 provides three $2,000 scholarships annually to honor Larry Marquardt, the first executive director of Council 31 and a tireless union organizer who dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people.

Gabriel Dunbar

Gabriel Dunbar, a graduate of Oak Park and River Forest High School, will attend Indiana University’s Kelley Business School this fall. His father, James Dunbar, is a member of AFSCME Local 3436 and works as a senior parole agent for the state of Illinois in Chicago. Gabriel demonstrated his awareness of the role of big corporations in our country’s economy and their impact on working people in his application essay. “In recent years companies have gotten bigger and now enjoy unprecedented protections from the government,” he wrote. “But the protections and benefits for companies unfortunately have not trickled down to employees.” Gabriel argued for protecting and expanding collective bargaining rights to create “win-win scenarios that yield profits while meeting the needs of the workers and their families.” That’s why he chose to study business, “to help people and organizations make value-driven and sustainable choices about their resources and hopefully create some of those win-win outcomes.”

Patricia Santelices

Patricia Santelices is entering her second year at Quincy University where she has maintained an excellent GPA as she pursues her goal of becoming a nurse practitioner. Patricia’s parents are both AFSCME members. Her father, Keith Powell, is president of AFSCME Local 3567 at Western Correctional Center. Her mother, Marilyn, is a certified nursing assistant at the Quincy Veterans Home and member of AFSCME Local 1787.

“Ever since I was a young girl, I have understood the importance of having a stable, safe job,” Patricia said in her application essay. “Both of my parents have careers that are protected under the AFSCME union and I couldn’t be more thankful for that.”

Bianca Savant

Bianca Savant, a graduate of Whitney Young Magnet High School in Chicago, will attend the University of Illinois this fall to pursue a biology degree. Bianca’s mother, Shubhada Savant, is a member of AFSCME Local 505 who works for the City of Chicago’s Department of Transportation. As chief programmer, Shubhada works with database management and analysis, computer programming and information technology. Her daughter has inherited her affinity for science and mathematics and is considering careers in research and medicine. Knowing that her mother has the security of a union job has made pursuing a college degree easier. “I’m more relaxed than other people I know, because I know that my mom can help me,” Bianca said. “It takes a lot of the stress off.”

Her mother agrees. “The union has been very helpful to create a good work balance in my life,” Shubhada said. “My rights are protected and I am able to give time to my family to take care of their needs and support them in their goals.” After all the hard work of taking care of her daughter, now Shubhada looks forward to seeing the results: “I’m excited for Bianca’s future and what it looks like.”

AFSCME International Family Scholarship Winner

Anthony Ruhulessin

The son of AFSCME Local 3477 member Jeannie Bellina, Anthony Ruhulessin, was awarded the 2018 Family Scholarship by AFSCME International. His application essay was reprinted in the March-April issue of On the Move (page 2).
Retirees ready to fight after Janus decision

On June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court sided against working people and ruled that fair share fees are unconstitutional. Public sector unions can no longer collect reduced fees from bargaining unit employees who don’t wish to pay them, but must continue to represent them as full members.

“The Janus case is an attempt to take away the power of the union and the voice of the people,” said Don Todd, Sub-Chapter 86 President (Springfield). “But I was around before fair share. I know if we stand together what amazing things we can get done.”

AFSCME members are standing strong, more determined than ever to protect workers’ rights and improve the futures of their families and communities. They will need the help of retirees who have been through similar challenges.

“Retirees set the path for everything current working members have,” said Jay Ferraro, Sub-chapter 69 President (Rockford). “None of our contracts were simply given to us. We had to fight for everything. We didn’t have rights before collective bargaining but we are still here. Now more than ever we need to stand together.”

You can get involved in the fight for our union by contacting your sub-chapter president to help with member education and outreach.

“There is a lot at stake,” said Todd, “and our best defense is standing in solidarity.”

Retiree honored at Mother Jones Dinner

AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 Executive Board Member Melissa Garman wins award.

Garman was born and raised in Chicago, a proud product of Chicago public schools, and attended Northern Illinois University to study political science. After graduation, she eventually settled in DeKalb and began her 52-year career as a child abuse investigator with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

Early in her state career, Garman became active in AFSCME Local 448, and after retiring, she stayed involved as a member of the Chapter 31 executive board.

Garman said the labor movement is in her veins: She carried her grandfather Sam’s eulogy in her pocket when she received the award. “Sam embodied all of the qualities of a strong union member,” Garman said. “He was the president of the Chicago Fur Workers Union in the 1950s and devoted his life to the labor movement and the common man. He fought against discrimination of all minorities. I am a part of a strong lineage of activists. Winning this award is an honor.”

Solidarity for my daughter

On May 10, more than 1,000 AFSCME members marched to the Capitol to call on legislators to finally pay one of the state’s oldest debts. Chapter 31 retirees were there to march with them.

In July 2011, the state failed to pay negotiated wage increases to more than 20,000 employees. The Illinois Supreme Court ruled that the funds must be paid, but required a special appropriation passed by the General Assembly. Gov. Rauner vetoed a bill with the required appropriation in 2016.

But finally in this 2018 legislative session, not only was a back pay bill passed by both houses, but an appropriation for all the wages owed was included in the 2019 budget.

Retirees attending the May Lobby Day either had back pay owed to them or were standing in solidarity with others owed money. Sub-chapter 90 member Todd Vincent drove more than three hours from Anna, Illinois, to support his daughter Natalie Stanley, a Local 3280 member affected by unpaid wages.

“I believe that I should stand in solidarity with my daughter,” Vincent said. “She wants to strengthen her union and make sure that everyone gets paid fair wages. That is something that I fought for before we had a contract. We know the importance of standing together. We are a union family through and through.”

“It means a lot to me that my dad was by my side,” Natalie Stanley said. “He really knows what it means to be in the union and how hard we fight for our workplace rights. In the future, when I retire, I will sign up to be an AFSCME retiree so I can continue to fight for everything that the union does and continues to do for working members and retirees.”

“The union is its members and we have to take care of each other, regardless if we are retired or working,” Vincent said. “We all have to be union strong, no matter the issue.”
Tell us about your job at Anderson Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area.

I’ll tell you what, I have a ball. It’s great. It’s hard work but it’s rewarding. There are very few boring moments.

Day to day, we manage more than 90 campground sites, registering campers, mowing, cleaning latrines. We’re in a floodplain so we are often cleaning debris washed up after floods.

A big part of our job is preparing for and managing hunting seasons. Turkey, deer and dove hunting season are busy. But our biggest hunting season is duck season.

We plant corn and in late summer we pump water from Anderson Lake to flood Carlson Lake and another 90-acre field so that the water covers the corn up to the ears so the ducks can feed on it. Those are the best hunting areas.

When the season starts, we check hunters in and out and draw for "blinds" and "timber holes" (platforms that hunters build in GPS-specific spaces). We track all the species of ducks and the total number of hunters.

What’s your favorite part of the job?

Being outside. I come to work and we have baby geese running around, turkeys, baby fawns. We get eagles up and down the Illinois River, oodles and oodles of bald eagles.

My happiest time of the year is our youth waterfowl hunting weekend. I love getting to see the smiles on those children’s faces. It’s really important to teach youth the correct way to handle a firearm responsibly. It’s rewarding for the adult as well as the child.

How did you come to this career in public service?

It took a long time for me to get here. I’ve come full circle over more than 30 years as a state employee doing maintenance-type work. I started at New Salem State Historic Site in 1986. I worked in Springfield at the Willard Ice Building, at the Lincoln Developmental Center, at the school for the deaf in Jacksonville, and back to New Salem in 2007.

I came here to Anderson Lake in 2013 and I live with my family just seven minutes down the road on about 100 acres. I’m blessed beyond belief to be where I’m at.

How did you come to this career in public service?

I love being in nature, looking at God’s creatures. It’s a wondrous world we live in and you have to stop and look around. Some people are sitting in an office all day and I get to be out here on the water, seeing fish and wildlife, talking to campers and hunters.

I don’t know that I could find a more perfect job than what I’ve got. How can you have a bad day when you wake up and get to do what you love? There’s nothing bad, it’s all good. It’s all positive. It’s amazing.