

ON THE

MOVE

CARRY IT ON!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

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

ILLUSTRATION: RICARDO LEVINS MORALES, RLMARTSTUDIO.COM

**AFSCME MEMBERS
GIVE BACK**

PAGE 3

**CGH EMPLOYEES
JOIN AFSCME**

PAGE 5

**MORE PARENTAL LEAVE
FOR STATE EMPLOYEES**

PAGE 8-9

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2020—Let's carry it on!

2019 has been a year we won't forget



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

**WE LIT A FIRE.
LET'S KEEP
IT BURNING
BRIGHTER
THAN EVER.**

What a year 2019 has been for public service employees in Illinois. January brought the final days of former governor Bruce Rauner's term of office—the end of four long years of ceaseless assaults on union members, our rights, our wages and benefits, and on the services we provide.

After suffering one of the worst defeats in Illinois history in the 2018 election—a firm repudiation of his slash-and-burn tactics—Rauner nonetheless pressed on with his attacks on workers' rights until his last official breath in office.

He refused to comply with an Illinois Labor Relations Board order that state employees should be restored to their proper step and made whole in the wake of the illegal freeze he'd imposed during his first months in office. He also refused to comply with the Labor Board's order to return to the bargaining table with our union once his claim of "impasse" had been rejected by the appellate court. And he filed petitions at the Labor Board seeking to strip some 1,000 state employees of their collective bargaining rights.

State employees were undoubtedly Rauner's top target, but they were not the only ones harmed by his policies. When he forced a budget stalemate in an effort to push through anti-union legislation, many non-profit human service agencies that depend on state funding were forced to lay off staff or even close their doors, harming communities most in need. The budget stalemate also cut off state funding to local governments, leaving cities and counties struggling.

State universities were particularly hard-hit—both their operating budgets and their student assistance grants—by a governor who appeared to be hostile to the very notion that working people should have access to affordable higher education.

Then, of course, there was Rauner's zealous campaign to eliminate union fair share fees in the hope of bankrupting public sector unions. When the courts

struck down his initial executive order and denied his standing to file suit in federal court, an amended lawsuit with state employee Mark Janus as the plaintiff was filed. And when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned 40 years of settled law and declared fair share fees unconstitutional in 2018, Rauner claimed credit and crowed that the ruling would propel employees to abandon their unions in droves. But rather than drop out, thousands of employees signed AFSCME Strong cards and pledged to remain union members.

In the end, Bruce Rauner had few allies and even fewer friends. Only a handful of entities—like the fiercely anti-worker Chicago Tribune and the fiercely anti-union Illinois Policy Institute—stuck with him to the bitter end.

Many factors contributed to Rauner's political demise, but undoubtedly one of the biggest was the unwavering resistance that AFSCME members mounted to his perverse assaults. Every type of employee from every corner of the state came together in demonstrations large and small, from massive rallies in the streets to informational pickets at worksites.

In mid-January 2019 a new governor was inaugurated and a new era ushered in. In a matter of months, the pace quickened and spirits lifted.

With Governor JB Pritzker's leadership, the state's minimum wage rose, funding for state universities and K-12 education was increased, assaults on pensions were rebuffed, and perhaps most importantly, the fair tax constitutional amendment was approved for voter referendum that could provide a permanent fix for Illinois' crumbling financial edifice.

For AFSCME members, the

changes were equally momentous. By early April, state employees had all been restored to their appropriate steps. By June a new union contract was in place that included raises totaling 11.5% over the term of the contract. By September employees had received back wages plus interest for the steps that had been withheld.

Over the past year, local governments have become more stable as a steady stream of state funding has aided their finances. State universities have begun to regain their footing and rebuild their standing. Nonprofit agencies have received additional funds to help boost the wages of their underpaid employees. And new legislation was enacted to aid public sector unions in meeting the challenges posed by the Supreme Court's Janus ruling.

With each passing month, it became ever clearer that union members were tolling the final bell for Bruce Rauner's fantasy of an eviscerated labor movement, impoverished by the end of fair share fees.

Instead public sector unions have regrouped, stronger than ever. Instead of leaving the union, state employees who have lost their bargaining rights are pressing to regain union representation. Instead of lying low, teachers and support staff in Chicago went out on strike for nearly three weeks—and won!

Instead of shying away from political activity, AFSCME and other unions joined together in Chicago and other cities around the state to elect growing numbers of progressive, pro-worker candidates to city councils. Instead of accepting that low wages are the price of providing human and health services to those in need, more and more of these human service workers are coming together to form unions and demand a living wage.

It's been a year that few of us will ever forget, and most will want to remember for decades to come—a compelling reminder of the power of solidarity. We lit a fire, AFSCME family. Let's keep it burning brighter than ever in the new year. 

Council 31
AFSCME
We Make Illinois Happen

On the MOVE

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

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director
Mike Newman, Deputy Director
Nell McNamara, Editor
Tom Greensfelder, Designer

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

Executive Director
Roberta Lynch

State Sector Executive Vice-President
Ralph Portwood, Local 1866

Private Sector Executive Vice-President
Yolanda Woods, Local 2481

Local Government Executive Vice-President
John Rayburn, Local 1215

Secretary
Dave Delrose, Local 1028

Treasurer
David Morris, Local 805

BOARD MEMBERS

State Conference Board Co-Chairs
Kathy Lane, Local 448
Tim Worker, Local 993

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS

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

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS

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

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS

Shaun Dawson, Local 2073
Lori Gladson, Local 51
Steve Howerter, Local 3585
Melanie Hoyle, Local 2600
Matt Lukow, Local 1964
Trudy Williams, Local 3433

REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS

Jerry Grammer, Local 1175
Tad Hawk, Local 1805
Chris Milton, Local 799
Cary Quick, Local 141

TRUSTEES

Tom Brown, Local 3654
Jeffrey Reighter, II, Local 2856
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693

RETIREE CHAPTER 31 REPRESENTATIVE

Larry Brown

Who better to help than us?

AFSCME members come together to aid those in need



Local 46 members from the East Moline Correctional Center surprised the school district with a large donation of winter gear.

Every holiday season, AFSCME locals around Illinois take time to spread cheer to those who need it most in their communities, making others feel warm and bright.

Members of AFSCME Local 46 at East Moline Correctional Center donated winter coats, hats and gloves worth \$3,500 to the East Moline School District #37.

"We heard stories of kids getting off the bus in 30-degree weather with no coats," President Cody Dornes said. "We have more than we need so we wanted to give back to the community."

The local has been doing this "more and more," Dornes said. "Last year we did a Wounded Warriors Foundation donation and back in August we did a school supply drive for the school district. This time we decided to go for coats."

He said the executive board started out with a plan to donate 20 coats.

"The next thing you know it was 30, 50, 100 coats," Dornes said. "The e-board members kept wanting to increase and increase it. Finally, we decided we would see how much \$3,500 would buy."

Schools Superintendent Kristin Humphries was thrilled when the union members unloaded a couple pallets of warm winter gear at the district headquarters. The district posted this message along with a photo to its Facebook page:

"A big THANK YOU to our friends at AFSCME Local 46 from the East Moline Correctional Center for donating 120 coats, hats and gloves to the needy children of our community! We are inspired by their

generosity and support of our students. Thank you to all the union members that made this possible!"

The local's ongoing efforts will help children, but also serve to educate the community about what unions do for families.

"I think unions have to get out there," Dornes said, "and start letting people know: We're part of the community, we serve the state and we're here to fight not just for our rights but for everyone."

Doing good together

For 15 years, AFSCME Local 3783 members at the Elk Grove Village Library have organized a "reuse and recycle" auction that raises money for needy families. Employees donate gently used items, then bid on what they want to take home.

"We vote on a certain dollar amount and whatever we don't collect, we make up the difference," said executive board member Ellen Chromik. "It's fun and feels good. The township and village coordinate together so with other businesses we're able to help more than 300 families."

AFSCME Local 2953 members at the Village of Niles partnered with a local church and St. Vincent de Paul Society to sponsor 14 underprivileged individuals, ranging in age from six to 78 years old.

"These 14 people when given the chance to fill out their 'wish list' heartbreakingly asked for things that most of us take for granted," Local President Mark Blickhahn said in a letter to members. "Hats, gloves, shoes, socks and blankets were among the most-requested items."

The 33-member local quickly answered the call for sponsors. And they made the

effort fun, shopping together and wrapping the gifts in bright holiday paper after work one evening. The village management team supplied the pizza.

"It was incredible to see what could be done when we all were working together," Blickhahn said.

Feeding the hungry

Before Thanksgiving, a group of Local 3537 members in DeKalb County helped pack 135,000 meals at Feed My Starving Children, a global anti-hunger organization.

"That's enough to save the lives of 369 children for a year," said President Chuck Coulter. "We're very proud of the work we are doing and hope to get more people involved next time around."

And in Galesburg, AFSCME Local 1274 members from the Henry Hill Correctional Center donated \$2,000 directly to the local FISH food pantry.

"Our giving has been building over the last several years," Local 1274 President James Stickle said. "The word has gotten out and it's taken root. This year the motion came straight from the membership and it was pretty awesome to see that." 🦋



Local 2953 members at the Village of Niles wrapped Christmas gifts for community members in need.



Local 3537 members from DeKalb County helped pack 135,000 meals before Thanksgiving.



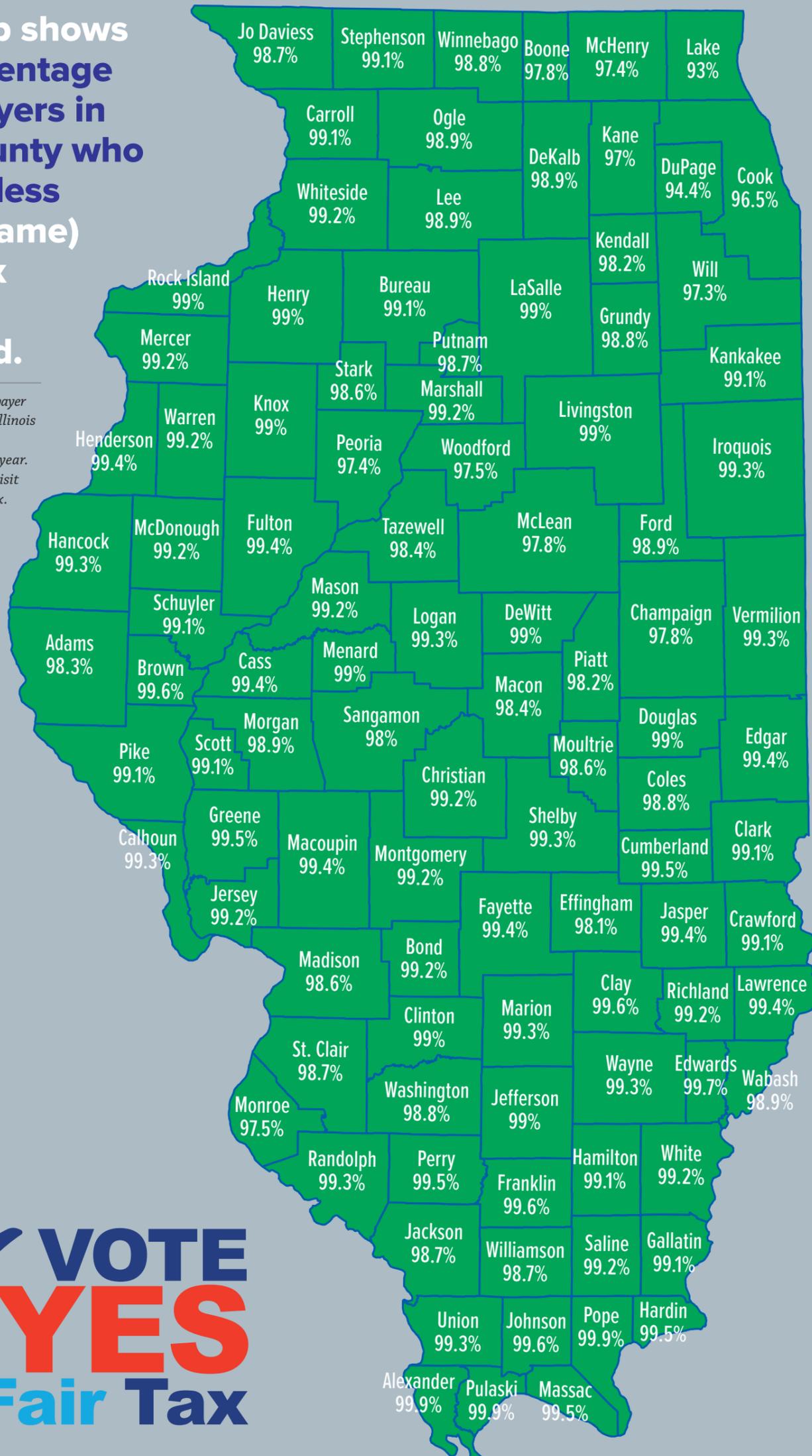
In Galesburg, Local 1274 members from the Henry Hill Correctional Center donated \$2,000 to the local food pantry.

What will Fair Tax reform mean for me and my community?

We need fair tax reform because the old way of taxing income in Illinois is unfair and inadequate. If the fair tax ballot measure is approved by voters in November, the wealthiest top 3% of taxpayers will pay a little more on income over a quarter-million dollars a year, while the rest of us—97%—get a tax cut or pay no more than we do now.

This map shows the **percentage of taxpayers in each county who will pay less (or the same) if fair tax reform is passed.**

Source: County-level taxpayer information is based on Illinois Department of Revenue data from the 2017 tax year. For more information, visit AFSCME31.org/FairTax.





CGH Medical Center employees join AFSCME

Hospital workers seek improved patient care

On Dec. 5, AFSCME Council 31 filed majority-interest petitions with the Illinois Labor Relations Board that, when certified, will establish a newly formed local union representing 800 employees of CGH Medical Center in Sterling.

Filing for recognition of their union is the culmination of a six-month organizing drive led by CGH employees themselves. The soon-to-be union members at the hospital include registered nurses (RNs), certified nurse assistants (CNAs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), phlebotomists, medical assistants and other health care workers.

"We're really pleased to welcome CGH employees to our always-growing union family," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "Together we can make CGH Medical Center an even better place for employees and patients alike."

Forming a union

Because CGH is a public hospital, workers could choose to join AFSCME by signing a union card. In essence, their signature is their "yes" vote for union representation. Instead of a one-time election, cards can be collected over time and submitted to the labor board for certification once a majority of all impacted employees have signed.

CGH employees were able to

do this in less than six months, a big accomplishment for such a large unit. Next the labor board will verify the signatures on the cards and ultimately certify the bargaining unit. Then it's time to negotiate a union contract. But it won't be easy.

"CGH management has been clear that they do not want a union because they don't want their employees to have a real voice," said Council 31 Organizing Director Abbey Davis. "We hope to be able to work with CGH and have a constructive relationship, but, unfortunately, it is all too likely they will continue to try to thwart their employees' efforts to have a voice on the job."

The hospital currently faces unfair labor practice charges for discrimination and retaliation against union supporters.

Courage for their patients

Patient care was the number one motivator for employees at CGH. They wanted a voice in decisions that affect patients

and fair treatment as they do their work.

"We're there for the patients and everything that affects us affects the patients," said organizing committee member and operating room technician Brenda Holldorf. "I'll be honest, I was scared. But I knew a union was the way to have a voice."

Holldorf has worked at CGH for 28 years and is motivated by concern for her daughter, Ashley Nares, a medical assistant in the hospital's clinic, and the other younger people building their careers at CGH.

"We're stronger all together."

"I tell them, CGH is their future," Holldorf said. "I'm not going to be here forever, and this is your chance to be part of making changes."

Brittney Zemke, a registered nurse, wanted to focus on improvements to retain good employees.

"It was really frustrating to see good nurses leaving to go somewhere to make more money or because they weren't being treated fairly and nobody [in management] was upset about it," she said. "I wanted the union to help draw in more people and keep them here."

Scrub technician Heather Gould said she joined the fight so that management would have to listen to what frontline staff have to say.

"We've been pulled into the office and basically bullied and threatened by management," she said. "Sometimes I wasn't brave. I would leave their office crying. But I love my job so much and I want it to get better so we can have a say and be treated with respect."

Community support

AFSCME members from Illinois and across the country came to support CGH employees as they worked to organize their union, knocking on doors, encouraging workers to sign a union card and testifying to the benefits of union representation in a hospital setting.

Labor and community leaders, elected officials and clergy came to Sterling City Council meetings to urge Mayor Skip Lee to affirm the workers' rights to organize. And more than 100 of those leaders signed a letter that was presented to the hospital's board of directors.

All that work didn't sway management or the board, but it did bolster the spirits of CGH employees who needed the support.

"It felt great knowing we're

not alone, because in the beginning that's how it felt," Gould said. "Just to know people in the community had our backs gave us more strength to keep moving forward."

Ready to keep fighting

"It's been a privilege to work with these courageous workers who have stood up to the largest employer in town to make sure they have a voice not only for themselves but for their patients and their community," Council 31's Davis said. "They have what it takes to keep fighting."

"Sometimes I would get down because it was so hard, but I'd go to a meeting and feel much stronger," Holldorf said. "This whole experience has made me a stronger person, fighting for myself and all of us fighting for what's right. We're stronger all together."

"I am just really, really thrilled," Zemke said the day before AFSCME filed the petitions. "I was hopeful that it would happen but to hear that we are filing tomorrow is just awesome. I'm hopeful that now even more people will join."

"Knowing we filed feels amazing," agreed Gould. "Now we're motivated and ready to keep fighting. We're finally past that hurdle and we have power." 

AFSCME Free College

Members and their families are eligible for free online associate degree



A BIG ACCOMPLISHMENT

Bill Jones

AFSCME Local 3692
Cook County Correctional Sergeants

I've been in the Cook County Sheriff's department since 1991. It will be 30 years when I retire next year.

I was at a union conference and heard about the AFSCME Free College program. I wanted to take advantage of a free education. Any time a union or organization wants to pay for you to go back to school, you should take advantage of it!

I started in 2016 and I graduated this May with honors. I was on the dean's list and the National Honors Society. 'I did all that at 57,' I said to my grandkids. 'If I can do it, you can do it.'

Free means free

The average course was between \$400 and \$600 a credit and I had to take 18 credits, but all the classes were free. You do the math on the value.

Listen to me, when I say free—I spent zero dollars. AFSCME paid full tuition. All I had to pay for was my cap and gown. 

The AFSCME Free College benefit has been making it possible for AFSCME members, retirees and their families to earn an associate degree online, completely free.

Through a partnership between AFSCME and Eastern Gateway Community College, AFSCME members and their children or stepchildren, grandchildren or step-grandchildren, spouses, domestic

cybersecurity, finance, marketing, human resources and more.

Any corrections employee who graduated from the 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 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 Commission, an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. 

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



"I did all that at 57," I said to my grandkids. "If I can do it, you can do it."

partners, siblings, parents and financial dependents are eligible to earn an associate degree with no out-of-pocket costs.

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,

New for 2020: AFSCME expands college program to four-year degrees

AFSCME is introducing an online bachelor's degree completion program exclusively for members and their families that will cost a fraction of regular college tuition. Partnering with Ohio's Central State University, a regionally accredited public university, AFSCME members, active retirees and their eligible family members can now complete an online bachelor's degree at a greatly reduced rate.

The program, which starts Jan. 13, allows people who have already completed associate degrees, or who have 60 credit hours towards degrees in business management or teacher education (the two majors currently offered by CSU) to attend CSU at a deeply discounted cost.

Eligible students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and use any federal or state grants, as well as any employer or union-sponsored tuition assistance. Then, a Student Success Grant will be applied toward tuition, fees and books so that the most a student will pay out of pocket annually at this time would be \$4,500 (\$187.50 per credit hour), a third of the national average. For many, it could be less, depending on available federal grants. 

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR LOW-COST EDUCATION

- ✓ Credits can transfer to other schools.
- ✓ Advising and tutoring are available to support students.
- ✓ Classes begin every eight weeks.
- ✓ Students can enroll in the online bachelor's degree program from anywhere in the country.
- ✓ Students can attend full-time or take as few as one class per term.
- ✓ Additional degrees will be added in 2020.

AFSCME Care Campaign fighting for wage increase

Higher rates to boost disability workers' pay, reduce waiting lists

A FSCME has spearheaded an effort to raise wages for direct service personnel (DSPs), successfully lobbying the Illinois General Assembly and two governors to gradually increase the state's reimbursement rate to community disability agencies.

But wages are still far too low, causing high frontline employee turnover rates and long waitlists for services.

Nearly 20,000 disabled adults in Illinois are on a waiting list to get into adult programs for individuals with disabilities and most wait an average of seven years for a spot, according to the Chicago Tribune.

The courts have said that if the state privatizes services, it must still ensure access, and chronic staffing vacancies are a barrier to access.

Legislature increases rates

When Gov. JB Pritzker's \$40 billion budget passed last June with bipartisan support, it included a 3.5% rate increase for state-funded community disability agencies and a 5% increase for youth care

agencies.

The General Assembly did not mandate the rate increases to be fully for wages, but rather indicated that either all or a portion of the increase should be used for wage increases.

That means that AFSCME members are working to get as much of that funding for wages as possible at the bargaining table.

"AFSCME local unions in direct care agencies have language in their union contracts that requires a wage reopener when there's new money allocated by the state," Council 31 Director of Special Projects Meg Lewis said. "Many have negotiated wage increases or are in the midst of negotiations."

AFSCME Local 2690 at Trinity Services, Inc.—a large disability agency in Northern Illinois—recently negotiated a wage reopener with their employer and the membership

ratified it on December 2.

Pushing for fair wages

Sanina Campbell, the local's vice president, said she and her fellow members are very happy with the progress they have made in the last three years, but they are determined to continue fighting for what they need and deserve.

"At first management didn't want to give us any of that 3.5%," she said. "They wanted to keep the money for themselves, but we had that reopener in our contract and negotiated an increase."

these have been hard fought but steady. And when the local's contract opens for negotiation in April, she and her co-workers are prepared to fight.

"We're taking the tools we've learned from AFSCME and putting them into play to make us successful," Campbell said. "We're ready, we have a plan and we are determined to get more and improve the conditions that we work in." But Campbell said she and her co-workers are concerned about wage compression with the recent and upcoming increases in the state's minimum wage.

"We want our senior staff to be above the minimum wage so we don't have people with more

Raoul announced in a court filing that the state would allocate \$56 million to ensure compliance with the minimum wage increases and make sure the critical work DSPs do is compensated better than fast food or warehouse work.

DHS allocated the additional funding to help agencies meet the minimum wage requirements and bring DSP wages to \$13 an hour statewide. They calculate this as a 58-cent increase in Chicago and a 62-cent increase in the rest of the state.

However, despite the clear message from the Attorney General that the funds should go towards wages, DHS has hesitated to issue a clear directive to employers on that front.

Council 31 is pressing the agency to make it clear where the money should go: to frontline employees.

Both agencies and employees must wait, however. Just like the 3.5% increase included in the budget, this new funding requires federal approval. The process takes at least 90 days and may take longer.

"We all deserve more for the work that we do," Campbell said. "It's baby steps, we're inching along, but we're making real progress." 

"We all deserve more for the work that we do."

The bargaining committee was able to increase the starting wage for part- and full-time employees and secured between 25- and 50-cent increases for all employees. Plus, a dollar incentive bonus for good attendance was incorporated into every employee's base wage.

Campbell said gains like

than 20 years of experience only getting a dollar more than someone brand new," she said.

State finds more funds

They aren't the only ones concerned about this issue.

Attorney General Kwame



The bargaining team for AFSCME Local 2690 at Trinity Services, Inc. is striving for fair wages.

Juliana

BORN: JUNE 27 MOM: JENNIFER CURTIS
LOCAL 1805, ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

As soon as we found out we were pregnant, I started saving time. I didn't think I was going to qualify for the leave, so I talked to her and said, you stay in there! But it came down that as long as you were on leave when the new contract went into effect, you could have the 10 weeks. It was a great surprise. I'm so glad to have the extra time off work. I can't even put it into words.



Madalynn

BORN NOVEMBER 1 DAD: CJ DAVIES
LOCAL 632, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS;
MOM: DANIELLE DAVIES, LOCAL 674,
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

We were pregnant before the contract was finalized. I was going to give all four weeks to my wife, so I wasn't going to get any. When we found out about the new contract, we cried. It was just a huge relief. We're both home for 10 weeks.

This is our first child; I couldn't imagine going back to work after four weeks. Waking up every two hours is just exhausting. But more important is knowing that we just get to enjoy this time together. I've never been more thankful to our union, to the Pritzker Administration, and to everyone who was able to get this done. I'll always love my union for this. We went from stress to this miracle. It's heaven for us.



Noah James

BORN OCTOBER 6 DAD: RYAN WILLIAMSON
LOCAL 785, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

It helped out a lot. Now I don't have to rush to figure stuff out, to set up child care. I can take my time, relax and enjoy the time and not have to worry.

We still haven't fully adjusted. We haven't gotten him on a sleeping schedule. At night, my wife feeds him and I'm the diaper-changer. That would be so much to do in six weeks. This leave gives me more time to bond with my son and gives my family more time together.

The Most Precious Time

The first weeks of your child's life are incredibly special, life-changing and, of course, exhausting. But when you're worried about going back to work quickly to pay the bills, and making child care arrangements for an infant, it can also be very anxiety-provoking.

Since the new AFSCME contract with the state of Illinois was ratified last June, union members in state government who are welcoming new additions to their families are more able to focus on the baby joys, thanks to the contract's enhanced parental leave benefit.

The previous state contract included four weeks of paid maternity and paternity leave per family. So, if both parents work for the state, they have to split that four weeks of paid leave between them.

One of the goals of the AFSCME bargaining committee was to extend that policy to six weeks of paid leave, per each

employee. The committee maintained that priority throughout negotiations with Gov. JB Pritzker's administration.

Then, in a dramatic moment in the final hours of negotiations, Gov. Pritzker's chief negotiator, Robb Craddock, presented the governor's updated, final proposal. Pritzker would agree to increasing paid parental leave for birth and adoption of a child to 10 weeks. And if both parents are state employees, each is entitled to the full 10 weeks.

The room erupted in applause. The union committee's dedication to the issue kept it alive until the end and Pritzker kept his word to make Illinois a leader in family-friendly policies. Together, they changed the lives of dozens of families across the state who were expecting a child, and countless others in the months and years to come.

Jordan Noah

BORN JUNE 22 MOM: YOKFA COPELAND
LOCAL 2858, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The new policy was effective June 22—the day Jordan was born. There were three of us in the office due a week or two apart from each other and we all benefitted from the policy. It was such a blessing. The baby is so little; to be away from them is so difficult. I couldn't thank the union enough.



Bo Thomas

BORN OCTOBER 19 DAD: TRAVIS COWSERT
LOCAL 779, DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

Now that I'm in it, that 10 weeks is crucial and definitely worth holding out for. It's hard to put into words. It would be hard to go back to work right now. It allows us to get him on a sleep and feeding schedule and spend a little more time together. You're up every two hours for a while! And Bo is our first child together, so everything is new.



Julian Thomas

BORN OCTOBER 5 MOM: AMANDA KIMMEL
LOCAL 1019, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

I'm so thankful to AFSCME that we got this done. My husband and I are both state employees. We're at home right now and it's amazing that we get this much time off together to enjoy the baby, to really, truly focus on our family without being under the gun to go back to work and handle everything with such a little, little baby. We feel so blessed that we're able to have this time and just love our baby.

Nova Rose Marie

BORN AUGUST 14 DAD: CHRISHAUN KELLY,
LOCAL 172, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

It meant a lot to me and the family. I've never in my life had 10 weeks off work. I have four kids including Nova and I didn't get any time off with the other three. Her mom had a C-section so she couldn't do too much lifting, so me being there helped with her healing process a whole lot. And just the experience of being with my child right after she was born and not having to work, that was amazing to me.



Jahsiah

BORN JULY 22 MOM: SHANTA RICKS
LOCAL 674, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

This is my third kid, he's my only boy. When I got pregnant, I knew this was going to be my last baby, so I was saving and saving to make sure I could stay at home with him as much as possible. So, this was a blessing that I received these 10 weeks. Even now while I'm on leave, I'm making sure I'm paying my union dues. And Jahsiah and I attended the AFSCME Council 31 convention together. The union did so much for us.



Declan

BORN JULY 2 DAD: XAVIOR BARKLEY
LOCAL 1175, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Extending my leave from four to 10 weeks was awesome. Declan is my first kid, and this gives me time to adjust to being a parent and somebody needing me 24-7. It also gave us time to figure out where he would go while we're working. My wife and I are fortunate, but we're not rich. I couldn't have done this without the paid time.



Cook County, City of Chicago budgets avert layoffs

Promises fall short but AFSCME presses for improvements

The Cook County Board of Commissioners approved a balanced \$6.2 billion budget for FY 2020 on November 21. The budget sustains and improves vital services by investing in public safety and the county's health and hospital system without raising taxes or fees on residents.

"This budget builds on years of hard work that all of us have done: the difficult decisions, the hard votes that we have taken, the fiscally responsible steps," President Toni Preckwinkle said. "This has been possible because we focused on structural solutions rather than quick fixes and one-time solutions."

Preckwinkle had stressed that this budget would not require any employee layoffs. However, the county medical examiner's office decided to restructure its operations,

which did in fact target a number of employees for layoffs.

In the medical examiner's office, there are three employee titles that perform different tasks. The office decided to combine these into one job called a forensic technician, explained AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Helen Thornton.

"Then they refused to bargain with us over pay, qualifications, training and scheduling concerns," she said, "instead sending out layoff notices to all the current employees.

"We decided to reach out to commissioners for help compelling the medical examiner's office to provide solid evidence justifying the consolidation and a detailed plan for the transition, and to bargain over those changes," Thornton noted.

Ultimately the county did work with the union to ensure the employees' concerns were addressed. Only one employee was laid off and most other employees became forensic technicians and will receive adequate training. AFSCME is continuing to advocate for employees during the transition.

Conflict over mental health services

On November 26, the Chicago City Council passed Mayor Lori Lightfoot's budget, which

Lightfoot said would not require layoffs while maintaining current city services.

Unfortunately, the budget failed to keep the mayor's

The mayor's office agreed to expand the reach of the existing city clinics.

promise to reopen shuttered mental health clinics. Instead, it diverted funds to private agencies.

AFSCME mounted a spirited campaign to press for shifting services and new funding to public mental health clinics. Forty aldermen signed a letter to the mayor in

support of that approach.

The mayor's office eventually agreed to investments that will help expand the reach of the existing city clinics, including an additional \$2.5 million to upgrade clinic facilities, the addition of several new positions (outreach workers and psychiatric nurse practitioners) and a pledge to fill six open clinical positions, prioritizing the hiring of bilingual staff.

The city agreed to explore evening and weekend hours, expanding services to children and adolescents and other considerations to expand access to services.

The city budget also paved the way for expanding public library services. Branches will now be open on Sundays with the city adding significant additional staff to the library to facilitate that change.

New union members fighting for fair wages

AFSCME members at UCAN—a social service agency for youth in Chicago—continue to fight for their first union contract.

They won their union in March 2018, but management has refused to make real movement

at the table on wages for more than 18 months since.

On December 11, employees

delivered to CEO Zach Schrantz a letter signed by elected city, county, state and federal officials urging UCAN to work in good faith to reach a settlement.

"We see this as a choice for UCAN," the letter stated. "It is about priorities. We call on UCAN to meaningfully

demonstrate that staff who work every day to assist troubled youth are respected and valued by paying them a living wage."

While delivering the letter, employees were able to speak directly to Schrantz about their concerns and struggles.

"I wonder, how am I going to feed myself because I've got to make sure my kids are taken care of," said Devon Streeter. "And I'm not the only one. The wages we get right now just aren't sufficient."

"We're family-based, let's act upon that," said Arzell

"We call on UCAN to pay a living wage."

Thomas. "Give us the contract we deserve."

A negotiation session began directly after that meeting. Significant progress was made at the table that day, but the two parties are still at a standstill on certain aspects of the wage proposal as *On the Move* went to press.



Employees delivered to CEO Zach Schrantz (center) a letter signed by elected officials urging UCAN to pay fair wages.

Union gets justice for Chicago library employees

Steward's investigation finds contract violation



Maggie Miller and Jacob Cleary worked together to win a class-action grievance for Chicago Public Library employees.

A former bookseller, Jacob Cleary became a librarian at the Chicago Public Library because he “wanted to do less selling and more helping people.”

Now he's doing just that, as a librarian and as a vigilant steward and treasurer of AFSCME Local 1215.

Cleary heard that a Local 1215 member had asked her steward if she was on the right step after a recent promotion. She wasn't. The steward contacted Human Resources to fix the error.

Cleary wondered if the same mistake had been made with any other employees. The local's contract with the city includes two different step progressions based on hire date. Those hired on or before October 16, 2014, are on a higher scale, depending on title.

He started investigating.

Cleary looked through his membership list for employees who had been promoted to a higher classification after working for the library since before that date.

He called around and eventually got in touch with Maggie Miller, a librarian at Chicago's new Independence

branch. While getting her master's degree in library science, Miller had worked her way up from a part-time library page hired in 2013 to a full-time librarian.

“Based on what she shared with me, I saw that she had been put on the wrong step,” Cleary said. “I explained where she should be on the wage scale and asked if she

would be willing to sign a grievance.”

Miller was on board.

Ensuring fairness

“I WAS SURPRISED BECAUSE it was something I wouldn't have thought to question on my own,” Miller said. “I'm so glad he caught it. I felt lucky that he's our union steward.”

Cleary filed a class-action grievance on Miller's behalf, believing that CPL placed other members on the incorrect step upon their promotion. The grievance went to arbitration with Cleary and Miller as the

“I'm very proud that our library system has a union. We look after each other and take care of each other.”

union's witnesses.

“The union argued that the contract was unambiguous and that employees like Miller should be on a higher step,”

AFSCME Council 31 attorney Scott Miller (no relation) said. “The arbitrator agreed with us.”

On October 29 the union won a decisive victory. The arbitrator ordered the city to “immediately place [Miller] and similarly situated class members at the step and salary applicable” and further that “the employees shall be made whole for their losses.”

The arbitrator retains jurisdiction in the case as the class is identified and notified. AFSCME will be there to ensure justice is served.

Enforcing the contract

“THIS WAS A BIG WIN FOR Maggie Miller, but it wasn't just for her. It's a local-wide victory,” said Local 1215 President John Rayburn, who also serves on the Council 31 executive board. “There are a large number of people who could be affected.”

Rayburn said that when management added the sub-steps for new hires during contract negotiations, he and his bargaining team took extensive notes and relied on those as well as the contract itself to make their case to the arbitrator.

“When we got the phone call and the email that we won, we were celebrating,” Rayburn said.

Cleary said the arbitrator's award “feels great” and was ultimately because a union member asked a steward an important question: “Does this seem right?”

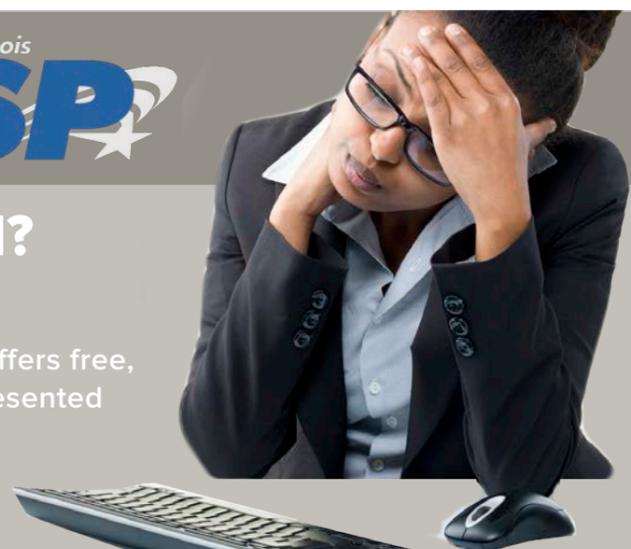
“I'm very proud that our library system has a union and we have really good stewards like Jacob,” Miller said. “Unions are very important. We look after each other and take care of each other.”

AFSCME Illinois
PSP

Worried? Overwhelmed? PSP can help!

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

Call now: 800.647.8776



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Local 3966 members Sonia Rudy-Beagan and Susan Kalthenbach bargained their first union contract.

First contract for Kendall County Circuit Court clerks

IN THEIR FIRST UNION CONTRACT as AFSCME Local 3966 members, 18 Kendall County Circuit Court deputy clerks and the financial manager won across-the-board raises of five to six percent each year of a five-year agreement—more than a 25% salary boost over the life of the contract.

Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Rick Surber, the bargaining committee was made up of deputy

clerks Susan Kalthenbach and Sonia Rudy-Beagan.

In addition to the significant wage hikes and increased starting wages, the committee won all the rights a union contract provides, including a grievance procedure, protection against unjust firing, and the

“We are proud to be members of AFSCME.”

right to negotiate over changes in working conditions.

The unit had previously

been represented by another union, but the employees weren't happy with its representation. When they saw their colleagues in other bargaining units making gains while they did not, they realized they needed a union like AFSCME to achieve their goals.

“Our pay was dictated by the county board. We saw money going to all other areas but not to us, yet we were some of the lowest paid in the county,” said Rudy-Beagan. “We kept thinking it would get better, but it didn't.”

“We thought if we can establish a union, we won't have to be so fearful and could have more of a voice,”

Rudy-Beagan said.

They reached out to AFSCME because of the union's expertise with public employee negotiations. And they feel strongly they made the right decision.

“We're very pleased,” Kalthenbach said. “AFSCME produced a valuable collective bargaining agreement that secured raises significantly greater than we thought possible. Our employer admitted that we would not have received such raises without the union.”

“Our union gave us a voice in the workplace,” Sonia Rudy-Beagan said. “We are proud to be members of AFSCME.”

Making headway at Rockford Public Library

AFTER EIGHT MONTHS OF negotiations, AFSCME Local 3350 members at the Rockford Public Library won a five-year contract with annual wage increases or bonuses and no changes to health insurance.

“Management started with a wage freeze at the table and wanted to maintain that for five years,” said local President Janella Harper Herbig. “Without our union we would not

have gotten any pay increase at all.”

The AFSCME team succeeded in pushing the board to provide cost-of-living increases

“Without our union we would not have gotten any pay increase at all.”

in the middle three years of the agreement with bonuses in years one and five.

Harper Herbig is a librarian assistant who has been at the library for more than 20 years.

“I like the people I work with,” she said. “I like our patrons and I like being able to share good books and movies with people.”

The bargaining team was also able to secure call-back pay for maintenance employees, a cell phone stipend for employees required to use their personal phone for work responsibilities and added sick time to take care of siblings.

Library pages have been added to the vacation schedule and the team also secured an additional week of vacation for part-time employees with 15 years of service or more.



AFSCME members at NEIU win tentative agreement!

After 18 months of extremely tough negotiations with management at Northeastern Illinois University, AFSCME Local 1989 members have won a tentative agreement with significant wage increases and improved benefits and union protections. As *On the Move* went to press, ratification meetings were being organized for the membership to consider and vote on the terms.

Harper Herbig is proud that the new contract extends the voting leave that library employees receive to part-time employees. “Sometimes it’s tricky to get to the polls,” she said. “Now all employees get two hours off to go and vote.”

Harper Herbig and AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser led the bargaining team, with members April Hancock, Maria Barcelona, Desheanda Ingram, Jean Lythgoe and Dave Fagen.

First union contract for Rockford police employees

AFTER AFSCME LOCAL 1058 at the City of Rockford welcomed their newest members in February—Citizen Reporting Unit (CRU) assistants in city police stations—the local union got to work getting them fair pay.

Local 1058 President Christina Loudermilk and Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser helped the new union members reach an agreement with the city that ensures they are covered by the local’s existing union contract, upgrades their pay grade and sets them on a step progression with rewards for longevity.

Instrumental in the functioning of the Rockford Police Department, CRU assistants help residents with important tasks such as filing sexual assault and domestic battery reports. They control and take custody of firearms and ammunition during citizen gun drops and buy-back programs.

The work is “fast-paced,” said new member Juliette

“We slipped through the cracks. Now that we’re with AFSCME, we’re where we should be.”

Kula, who has worked for the city for four years. “It’s never boring because we meet new people every day. We take police reports. We’re hearing stories and helping the public all day long, which is what I love to do.”



Some of the newest members of Local 1058, Rockford Police Department CRUs Juliette Kula, Kelly Anderson, Richard Kennedy (top, left to right), Brandon Schroeder, Christina Sorensen (bottom left) and Erin Dreger (bottom right).

The new wage scale for CRUs considers their responsibility and comparable wages for this kind of work in nearby

communities. In negotiations, the AFSCME team was able to put the workers on a higher pay grade and the appropriate step based on their total years of service to the city.

“Before they joined AFSCME, they weren’t able to get steps or longevity,” said President Loudermilk. “When they came in, they all got put where they should be right away. Every single person got a raise and can look forward to continuing step increases and longevity pay.”

The contract expires December 31, 2021, and with all the wage adjustments combined, the CRUs will see their salary increase anywhere from 14% to 18% by then.

The wage increases are much appreciated, Kula said, because “we slipped through the cracks. Now that we’re with AFSCME, we’re where we should be.”

And having union

protection is even more important.

“We feel more secure,” she said. “We’re not going to be alone if anything happens because we’ve got someone who’s going to back us up and help us out.”

Kula comes from a union family and was an AFSCME member when she worked in the city’s Head Start program.

“When I changed positions, I realized the things we weren’t getting because we weren’t in the union,” Kula said. “Now we get raises and we get recognition for the years we’ve put in. Everyone is very happy and really excited to move forward together.”

Lessons learned in Fulton County

IN THE WAKE OF THE TRAGIC murder of AFSCME Local 3433 member Troy Chisum, Fulton County jailers, 911 telecommunicators and sheriff’s deputies have negotiated improvements in their new union contract.

Local 3433 President Trudy Williams said the bargaining team won 8.75% in raises over the life of the four-year agreement with no change to health insurance. But the real focus, she said, was on “clarifying policies and procedures if, God forbid, we ever have a tragedy again.”

There was a whole new article created to outline procedures after a shooting or traumatic incident. A debrief-

“The board made sure Troy’s family was taken care of, but we wanted to make certain it would always be done that way.”

ing and counseling team will come to help the employees directly involved and their families.

“All of that was done when Troy died, but it wasn’t in the contract,” Williams said. “It was actually the county that suggested some of the changes.”

Another section of the contract called “line of duty injury or death” is now spelled out clearly; members will receive one year of pay if they lose their life on the job.

“When Troy was killed, there was language that could have been interpreted a number of ways,” Williams said. “The board made sure Troy’s family was taken care of, but we wanted to make certain it would always be done that way.”

The contract is retroactive to December 1, 2017. Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Lynch, Williams was joined at the table by Local 3433 members Ryan Maricle, Trever Kelley, Preston Harris, Grady DeFauw and Keith Wojtkiewicz. 

Illinois leads in protecting workers' rights

General Assembly responds to anti-union Janus ruling

IN RESPONSE TO THE U.S. Supreme Court's 2018 ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* that overturned 40 years of settled collective bargaining law, the Illinois General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1784. The new law will shore up union rights for Illinois workers. As *On the Move* went to press, the bill awaited Governor JB Pritzker's signature.

Its key provisions provide important privacy protections for public employees, affirm key collective bargaining rights, and clarify voluntary employee dues deduction procedures.

Protecting privacy

TO PROTECT EMPLOYEES' personal information, the law will prohibit disclosure to any third party of working and retired public employees' home addresses, phone numbers, paycheck deductions or other personal data.

The Illinois Policy Institute (IPI) and allied organizations used Freedom of Information Act provisions to secure this kind of employee information and then besieged union members with misleading mailers aimed at pressuring them to drop their membership.

"SB 1784 ensures that the personal information of public employees remains exactly that: private," said AFSCME Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin, who worked to educate lawmakers about the bill in Springfield.

Affirming workplace rights

THE NEW LAW WILL ALSO CLARIFY and codify workers' rights to the benefits and protections of collective bargaining in Illinois, Webb-Gauvin said.

Employers will now be required to provide union representatives with up-to-date information on bargaining unit employees so that local unions have access to current contact information and job titles as well as timely information on new hires.

The bill states that union representatives have the right to meet with new bargaining-unit employees and can communicate with all union-represented employees without retaliation.

"The law will protect every worker's ability to join a union," Webb-Gauvin emphasized, "and



allow local unions to educate new employees about their rights and protections."

Clarifying dues procedures

THE JANUS DECISION CREATED uncertainty and confusion for public employees, their unions and employers regarding dues authorization.

"Illinois unions want to remain in compliance with the Janus ruling and need reasonable guidelines for doing so," Webb-Gauvin said. "This law will stabilize and clarify all procedures within the scope permitted by the Supreme Court."

Under the new law, employees will be able to become union members by written or electronic means, paving the way for AFSCME Council 31 to begin the process of creating an online membership card.

SB 1784 passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both houses of the General Assembly with the backing of AFSCME Council 31 and a broad array of unions, including the Illinois AFL-CIO, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the

Illinois Education Association, SEIU Local 73, Associated Firefighters of Illinois, SEIU Healthcare Illinois-Indiana, Chicago Federation of Labor, Illinois Nurses Association and Laborers' Midwest Region.

No refund for Janus

THE NEW LAW WILL ALSO REAFFIRM that the dues and "fair share" fee collection procedures that were in effect for decades prior to the Janus decision were consistent with the pre-Janus established law, thus limiting retroactive liability for employers and collective bargaining representatives.

The need for this provision of the law was made clear by a slew of recent lawsuits, including one from Mark Janus himself. Backed by the IPI's Liberty Justice Center, he attempted to get reimbursement for fees he paid to AFSCME while he was represented by the union.

On November 7 a three-judge panel of the Illinois Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against him.

The court said Janus is not

"The law will protect every worker's ability to join a union and ensure that the personal information of public employees remains exactly that: private."

entitled to retroactive reimbursement of fees AFSCME collected in good faith, in accordance with the prevailing Supreme Court precedent. The panel also noted that Janus did not propose to give back the salary increases and benefits that AFSCME had won for him.

Union rights prevail

SINCE LAST YEAR'S SUPREME Court decision, there have been 20 court rulings in cases filed by people trying to recoup fair share fees from public unions. AFSCME and other unions have prevailed in every one of them.

"AFSCME members have responded to the Supreme Court's 2018 Janus decision with resilience and courage,"

said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "In every arena, our union continues to fight and win for working people: in the organizing trenches, at the bargaining table, at the ballot box and in the courts."

There's little doubt, however, that the wealthy elite backing IPI and its cohorts around the country will continue to try to use the courts to weaken the ability of working people to have a voice on the job by robbing unions of essential resources.

The IPI's legal arm has already filed a motion for a rehearing of Janus' case for reimbursement before the appellate court—and undoubtedly, they will push on until they can put the issue of fees previously paid before the same anti-worker Supreme Court that ruled in Janus' favor last year. 

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Chapter 31 executive board member Don Todd speaks at a news conference on the bill to cap insulin prices in Illinois.

Bill capping insulin cost passes

AFSCME JOINED THE ILLINOIS Alliance for Retired Americans, the American Diabetes Association, Citizen Action/Illinois, AARP and others in the Protect Our Care – Illinois Coalition to win the passage of Senate Bill 667, which caps the cost of insulin, in the fall veto session. Illinois is just the second state to do so.

“Like many of our members, I am among the 1.3 million Illinoisans living with diabetes, a dangerous but manageable disease,” said Don Todd, AFSCME Chapter 31 executive board member and president of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans. “It’s immoral for the drug companies to drive up the cost of insulin with no end in sight when it is so necessary and abundantly available.”

Currently, nearly a third of seniors in the U.S. have diabetes or pre-diabetes and are faced with massive hikes in the cost of some insulins. In fact, the cost of popular types of insulin has tripled over the last decade, increasing the price in some instances by as much as 800 percent. The new law will cap those costs at \$100 for a 30-day supply and require further study of prescription drug costs by the state Department of Insurance.

“The bill is a victory for the people in state-regulated health plans,” said Chapter 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe.

While the cap won’t apply to plans offered by large employers governed by the federal Employee Retirement

“It’s immoral for the drug companies to drive up the cost of insulin with no end in sight.”

Income Security Act, it’s estimated to affect approximately 20 percent, or 260,000, of Illinois’ 1.3 million insulin users.

“Thanks to countless grassroots advocates and the brave individuals who stepped up and shared their testimonies, the Illinois General Assembly sent a clear message that our state will no longer allow pharmaceutical companies to take advantage of Illinoisans living with diabetes by charging exorbitant prices for lifesaving insulin medication,” said the bill’s chief architect, Senator Andy Manar.

The passage of SB 667

proves that grassroots action can overcome opposition from big pharma and insurance companies. The Protect our Care – Illinois Coalition will continue efforts to make other widely used prescription medicines more affordable.

SERS addresses back-pay backlog

OVER THE COURSE OF EIGHT years, AFSCME waged and ultimately won an intensive battle to ensure that every state employee received the back pay

they were owed, either for a pay increase withheld by former Governor Pat Quinn or step and longevity increases withheld by Bruce Rauner.

But the work wasn’t over. SERS participants who retired from the state after 2011 and were owed back pay for wages, steps, or longevity received the money they were owed. But then they were told that the adjustment to their retirement benefits incorporating those increases might take up to three years to process.

“That was simply unacceptable,” said Chapter 31 President Larry Brown. “So AFSCME pressed SERS to take action to ensure pensions are adjusted in a timely manner.”

Last month, Chapter 31 sent a letter to SERS, communicating that retired members shouldn’t have to wait years to receive the pension benefits they earned. In addition, the union contacted those SERS trustees who are AFSCME members and requested that they too express their concerns about the lengthy delays.

In response to AFSCME’s advocacy, at its October 29 meeting the SERS Board approved the hiring of additional full-time staff, as well as an increase in overtime and temporary support employees, in order to aggressively manage the backlog of benefit adjustments.

These measures are anticipated to significantly reduce the estimated time needed to make the necessary adjustments to pension benefits based on back pay received.

“AFSCME Chapter 31 was established to protect the benefits that retirees have earned and to improve the quality of our retirement years,” Brown said. “Our progress in reducing the time for pension benefit adjustments clearly demonstrates the reach we have as organized public sector retirees.”

Season of giving

THE 35 SUB-CHAPTERS OF AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 generously donate to charities in their communities, including food banks, humane societies, homeless shelters, veterans’ programs and more.

“We know that today’s real average wage, after accounting for inflation, has about the same purchasing power it did 40 years ago,” said Barb Franklin, president of Sub-chapter 88 in the Champaign area. “Many of us with good benefits want to do our part to help those who need it, especially during this time of year.”

Sub-chapter 68 in DuPage County voted to support three homeless shelters and the Honor Flights for veterans this year, according to president Kim Johnson.

“During the holidays, countless people are facing struggles, be they financial, physical or emotional,” she said. “Any way we can assist in helping them cope brings us closer to achieving the true sense of community.”



Staying active and informed

AFSCME Sub-chapter 87 retirees met with Senator Andy Manar in Decatur on December 9. They talked about the importance of passing the Fair Tax in November and continuing to lower skyrocketing prescription drug costs.



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

Number one is my family. It's a good living and it provides for them. I have four sons, ages 18, 16, six and three.

Second is my co-workers. I work with the best people. We all get along great. We have fun and keep it moving. We work hard.

How does your union improve your work?

We've seen such a push from management on cutting corners and trying to make things work when they don't have the staff for it, just because they want to follow an order or look good.

Many times, the union has had to step in and say, this isn't safe, we don't need to be doing this, we need to shut this down until you get the staffing for it.

The union has also been really great about pressuring DOC to get vacant positions filled. Instead of filling vacancies, they try to add that work to someone else. AFSCME ensures that they hire people to do that work.

How has your union job impacted your family?

Job stability. Not having to worry about getting laid off or fired for no reason, being able to be comfortable at work and not fearing the working conditions.

The wages. Being able to provide for my family and being able to save up for rainy days.

Having four kids, insurance is critical. I hear horror stories from my friends in the private sector, how much they pay for insurance. The benefits that we've reaped by being union are huge.

Nick Crisman

AFSCME Local 472

CORRECTIONAL COUNSELOR,
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Tell us about your job at Sheridan Correctional Center.

As a Correctional Counselor II, I provide case management for offenders. My caseload is usually about 180 inmates and at Sheridan we aim to meet with each one every 30 days.

I help them obtain their birth certificate and Social Security card, which is very important. If you're getting released and you don't have identification that's a huge roadblock. We want to get these documents on file so when an inmate gets out, he can go get a state ID to get a job and housing. You're not going to get those things without your ID.

We also help them apply for Social Security benefits if they qualify and enroll them in different programs the state provides at Sheridan and for after they are released. Counselors act as intermediary with the families, setting up furloughs for funerals or when a family member is critically ill.

We also teach life-changing groups twice a week with 24 offenders in each group. Our "Thinking for a Change" program encourages them to change the way they think about their actions so they can get away from the criminal mentality of taking advantage of people.

We also manage program sentence credit contracts where inmates earn time off their sentence for participating in programs.

At Sheridan, every inmate is enrolled in an addiction treatment program so almost all the inmates earn these contracts. We make sure they're meeting the goals that are set forth and award the contracts.

"More offenders than you would think don't have anyone who is looking out for them."

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

More offenders than you would think don't have anyone who is looking out for them. They've either burned their bridges or their family might not be around or might be deceased. We're there to try and help that person get over the hump so he doesn't come back to prison. The economic impact of that alone is worth every penny that the state puts into it.

You're seven times more likely to be incarcerated if your parent was incarcerated. If we can help them stay out of prison, they can be there for their kids and grandkids. They are out of a vicious cycle.

What's your favorite part of the job?

I've been the president of our local for three years, so I know almost everybody. You work side by side with these people and you've got each other's back when it comes down to something you have to fight for. Everybody just bands together and it builds us stronger.

My favorite part is watching people retire. A lot of times it's also the hardest part. Seeing the culmination of their whole career and just trying to make it special for them. We want them to know, people care about you and we're so happy that you get to retire. It's awesome but it's bittersweet. 