

ON THE

MOVE

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**FROM MEMPHIS 1968
TO HERE AND NOW**

PAGES 2, 8 AND 9

VIRUS NOT VANQUISHED
PAGE 3

FAIR TAX FACTS
PAGE 5

VOTE BY MAIL EXPANDED
PAGE 7

ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A moment of historic reckoning

Our legacy: AFSCME stands for the rights of all



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE CANNOT CLOSE OUR EYES TO RACIAL INJUSTICE

We are in the midst of a global pandemic that has upended every form of social, economic and cultural activity in our country. From the outset, our union has been on the front lines of an unrelenting daily conflict with this ferocious invader, the coronavirus.

We've been able to ensure that thousands of employees can work remotely, safe in their own homes. And for those who've had to report to worksites to perform essential public services, we've put stringent safety protocols in place and made certain that needed personal protective equipment is available.

We have made clear beyond any doubt that AFSCME will not waver in our determination to safeguard the lives of every single member.

Yet even as we rise to meet the unprecedented challenges posed by this pandemic, our nation faces another test of historic magnitude. The flagrant killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in the broadest of daylight before dozens of witnesses has shaken our country to its core, forcing a profound confrontation with the persistence and depth of ingrained racial prejudice.

This also is a moment when our union is called to action. Diversity has always been our greatest strength—bringing together as we do working people of different races, religions, and regions, sexual orientation, political beliefs, and professions. From that diversity, we have strived over many decades to build unity, to come together in solidarity, and—fighting as one—to triumph time and again.

The wealthy and powerful who would keep us down have consistently sought to foster division and conflict, but AFSCME members have refused to succumb, choosing instead to find common ground on which to move forward together.

Now, as our country grapples with the harsh reality

of systemic racism so starkly exposed, we must recognize that common ground is no longer a sufficient foundation for progress. At this moment of national trauma, our union is called to move to higher ground.

It is a time to recall our own history, the legacy of those who came before us—in Illinois and across the country—who built a union strong enough to withstand the harshest assaults and brave enough to stand up for the rights of all.

From its earliest days, AFSCME opened its ranks to every worker, regardless of race or creed. We can think back to the historic Memphis sanitation workers strike of 1968 when the most marginal and oppressed of workers—hundreds of African-American trash haulers whose wages were paltry, whose equipment was decrepit, and whose pleas for fundamental fairness were ignored—came together as AFSCME members to demand fair pay, safe working conditions and fundamental respect in a Southern city where racism still ruled.

The righteousness of the sanitation workers' cause moved Dr. Martin Luther King to travel to Memphis to march with them and to share his vision of a better America. It was there, in the midst of that struggle, that his life was taken by an assassin's bullet.

The most iconic image of that hard-fought strike is the sign those workers carried, simply stating: I AM A MAN.

Why, some might ask, did they need to identify themselves as "men"—wasn't that plain for all to see? But, of course, their message was about

something much deeper—a firm insistence on their dignity as human beings. It was a necessary statement because their fundamental humanity was not truly recognized. Or, as Dr. King put it in his speech to the strikers, "We are saying that we are God's children."

It is a message that has reverberated down through the years—its echo heard in all the ensuing battles against racial discrimination and other forms of abasement that would deny or even crush that humanity.

It is a message rekindled at this moment in the declaration "Black Lives Matter." Like those signs carried in 1968, the clarion call of "Black Lives Matter" today is a necessary assertion because even after so many long years of suffering and struggle, the fundamental humanity of black people is still not fully recognized.

We must affirm that black lives matter if we are to give true meaning to our shared conviction that all lives matter. That affirmation does not mean that we set ourselves against those honorably engaged in law enforcement. But it does mean that we stand squarely for equal justice under the law and firmly against all forms of brutality, cruelty or wanton disregard for human life perpetrated by those pledged to "serve and protect."

We cannot close our eyes or turn away from the stark reality of racial injustice, just as we cannot ignore the profound threat posed by the coronavirus. Both can erode the solidarity we've worked so hard to build in our union and the democracy we've treasured as the hallmark of our nation.

So, yes, our union is called to lead at this moment of historic reckoning. We are called to move to that higher ground where every human life does matter, where the dignity of every human being is respected, where we can all meet as equals. Getting there may be a hard climb. But hard is what we know how to do. This is the challenge before us now—and it is one we cannot fail. 

Vanquishing the virus—the fight goes on

Positive cases on the rise as governments start to reopen

The number of COVID-19 cases was soaring in states around the country as *On the Move* went to press. Six months after the pandemic reached the United States, 4.46 million cases have been confirmed and more than 152,000 people have died from COVID-19, including more than 7,600 deaths in Illinois.

Progress in halting the virus' spread has been erratic. Some states never shut down; predictably, their COVID-19 cases are surging. Others that did put strict shutdown measures in place saw cases dramatically decline, but as they begin to reopen, the virus is beginning to spread again.

Because Illinois had an aggressive containment program, considered a model example of stopping the spread of the coronavirus, the state entered phase four—a partial reopening—on June 6. Then in July, cases started to rise again and Illinois broke its record for highest number of new cases in a single day.

Other states are far worse. The pandemic is growing in 39 states and the US has the highest growth rate of new cases in the world, followed by Brazil and India. Florida reported the highest single-day total of new cases on July 12 of more than 15,300.

Experts argue that the US hasn't done enough to stop the spread. Italy was an example of a country so ravaged by the virus that hospitals couldn't

help everyone who needed it. In July, it averaged just 200 cases a day while Texas (half as populous as Italy) had more than 9,000.

"Half measures will leave too many Americans not living with the virus but dying from it," warned Professor John M. Barry, author of *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*. "Had we done it right the first time, we'd be operating at near 100 percent now, schools would be preparing for a nearly normal school year, football teams would be preparing to practice—and tens of thousands of Americans would not have died."

Wear a mask

One of the best ways to stop the spread of the virus is wearing a face mask that covers the nose and mouth.

"The more individuals wear cloth face coverings in public places where they may be close together, the more the entire community is protected," said Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control

"THIS THING IS SERIOUS"



Art Gage, a member of AFSCME Local 3096 who helps care for vulnerable youth at UCAN, a nonprofit human service agency in Chicago, contracted the coronavirus. He was hospitalized with COVID-19 for more than two months and spent six weeks on a ventilator. He is now recovering in a rehabilitation facility and has an important message for all of us.

"This thing is serious. Wear your mask. Do not take COVID-19 for a joke, it is real serious. It can hurt you—even kill you. Do what the scientists and doctors are saying. It is by the grace of God that I pulled through and I am not done fighting back. We can beat this if you do the right things. Wear your mask, use your PPE. Keep yourself and others safe."

and Prevention. "If we could get everybody to wear a mask right now, I really think in the next four, six, eight weeks, we could bring this epidemic under control."

Illinois was one of the first states to require wearing masks in public spaces. That policy went into effect May 1. Gov. JB Pritzker has called for a national mask requirement, arguing that wearing masks "might be the most important thing we can do to save lives."

He criticized the lack of leadership from the Trump administration: "Let me be clear, this is not a reality TV show. There are real things that are happening in the United States."

Safety first

Tens of thousands of AFSCME members have been at their worksites daily throughout the pandemic in cities, counties, universities, school districts, and nonprofit agencies all across the state, performing work deemed essential.

Throughout that time AFSCME was on the job too, demanding safety measures in every worksite. In the early days of the pandemic in Illinois, eight AFSCME members lost their lives due to COVID-19 and many more contracted the virus. But in the ensuing weeks dramatic improvements in working

conditions resulting from the union's advocacy helped to prevent any further loss of life, including:

- Establishing special safety measures for 24-hour facilities;
- Securing desperately-needed PPE;
- Ensuring employees could work remotely where feasible;
- Pressing for adoption of detailed safety standards;
- Making sure that employees who do become sick have paid time off to recover or to care for a loved one who is sick;
- Reducing COVID-19 out-of-pocket health care costs; and
- Helping ensure ready and rapid access to testing.

In June when Illinois began to move into phase four of the governor's reopening plan, the state and local governments also began to call back employees who had been working remotely or on call at home. Once again, AFSCME was there to make sure that all buildings met CDC guidelines.

"We have repeatedly demonstrated throughout this public health emergency why it is so critical for workers to have a strong union that can fight for them on every front," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "AFSCME Council 31 and local unions across the state have been working without pause since the earliest days of this outbreak. Still, great vigilance is required as we move forward, as this virus is brutal and unrelenting." 



AFSCME Local 1805 members John Cerar, Jeri Bruce and Frank Williamson are on the front lines, helping Illinoisans visiting the COVID-19 testing site in East St. Louis. The site is 100% union.

Larry Marquardt Scholarship winners head to college

Three children of AFSCME members win annual scholarship



Congratulations to Rachel Ashley, Mary Hicks and Edward McMillian who were awarded AFSCME Council 31's 2020 Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

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

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

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

Recipients are chosen by the Marquardt Scholarship Committee, composed of Linc Cohen (retired Editor of *On the Move*), Letitia Taylor (retired AFSCME International Union Area Director) and Rosetta Daylie (retired Council 31 Associate Director). This year's scholarship winners are Rachel Ashley, Mary Hicks and Edward McMillian.

"It boosts my spirits to see the promise and determination of our young people to make a difference," Council 31 Associate Director Claudia Roberson said. "Children of AFSCME members know firsthand the power of a union to make a difference in the lives of union members, their families and all working people. Congratulations to all our 2020 applicants, and good luck."

Rachel Ashley, Charleston

Rachel Ashley plans to attend Eastern Illinois University this fall to pursue a degree in elementary education. Her mother, AFSCME Local 981 member Leslie Ashley-McLean, is an office manager at EIU and her local's chief steward.

"My mom and her union fight for the working class," Rachel said in her essay. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, my mom had to fight even harder for the working people at the university ... to allow those who could work from home to do so ... to get personal protective

equipment... and to allow seasonal employees to be able to receive unemployment benefits.

"The labor movement has always been important to workers, but it's more important than ever today," Rachel said. "The union is literally fighting for people's lives right now!"

Mary Hicks, Galesburg

Mary's mother, Gayla Hicks, is an office associate at Hill Correctional Center and a member of AFSCME Local 1274. Mary will be attending the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. She said her goal is to become a school counselor, "so I would be within the school's union."

In her application essay, Mary focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on essential workers.

"Not all of these employees are being protected or feel that they have a voice to communicate their concerns to their employer," she said. "Employees who are part of a union have a voice" and "help make a better work environment for all."

"Labor unions were originally formed to help protect employees from unsafe, unsanitary working conditions, low pay and long hours," Mary concluded. "Many things have changed in our world since the first unions were formed but it is clear unions are still playing an important part."

Edward McMillian, Chicago

Edward McMillian will study at Morehouse College this fall. He plans to become an accountant and dreams of owning his own firm. His mother, Jan Hooks, is a public service administrator at the state of Illinois and a member of AFSCME Local 2081.

Edward believes in the power of unions to ensure that more working people have access to affordable health care, especially during the current public health crisis.

"The labor movement is needed today more than ever," he said in his application essay. "Workers are concerned about their health and the steps their job will take to ensure that they have a clean workspace."

Edward already knows an important fact. Without unions, he says, "bosses would not take the necessary precautions to ensure their workers' safety." 

MORE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

AFSCME Family Scholarship

Each year the AFSCME Family Scholarship Program provides 10 \$2,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors that will be renewed for \$2,000 each year for a maximum of four years.

Union Plus Scholarship

The Union Plus Scholarship program, sponsored by the Union Plus Education Foundation, helps union members and their families defray the cost of higher education. Since 1991, the program has awarded more than \$4.5 million to deserving students.

Gerald W. McEntee Scholarship

In honor of former AFSCME Pres. Jerry McEntee, this one-time \$5,000 scholarship is awarded annually to an AFSCME member for use towards higher education. Apply online through the Union Plus Scholarship program.

William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship

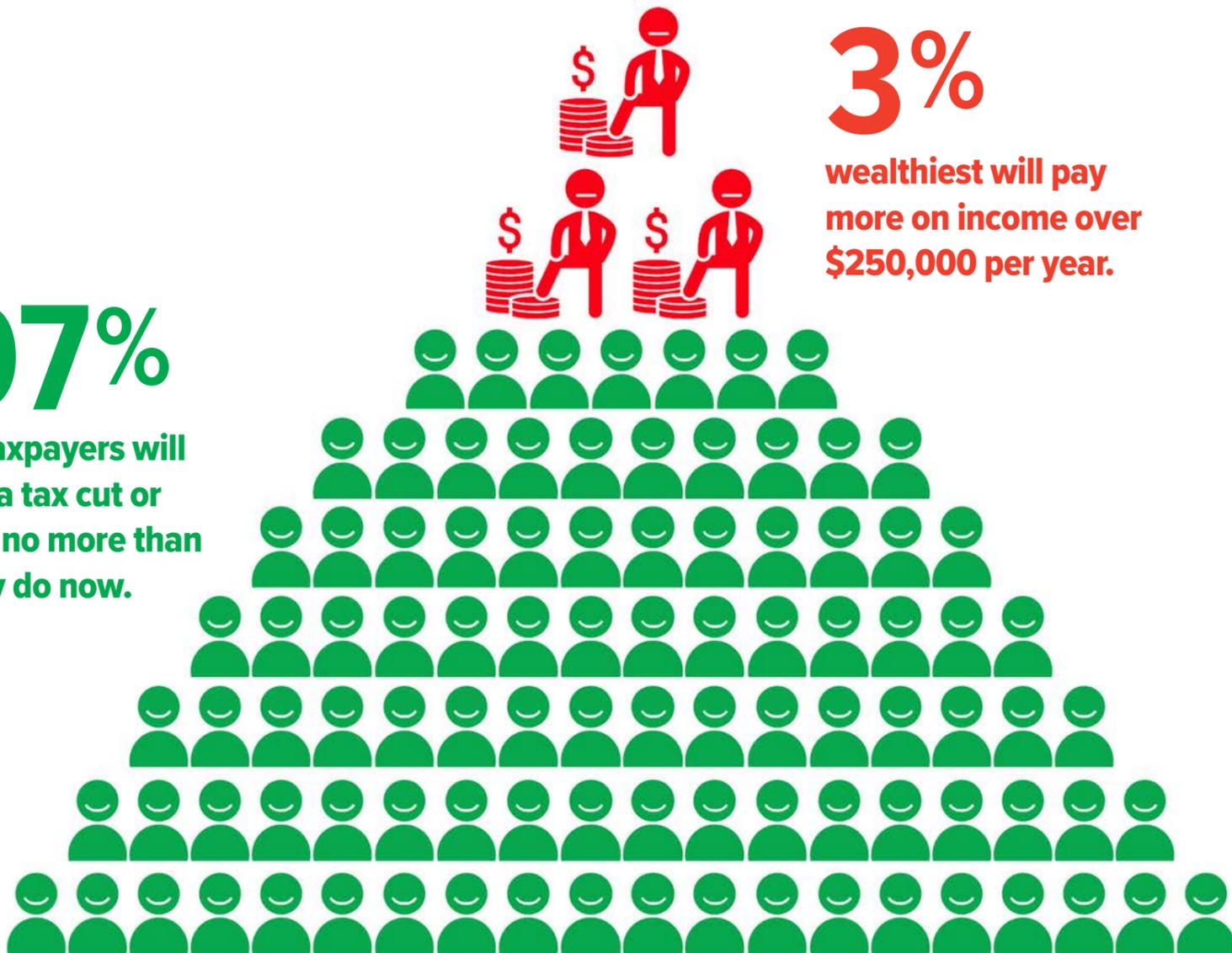
Each year, the Chicago Federation of Labor awards 10 William A. Lee Memorial Scholarships to high school seniors. The scholarships, valued at \$2,000 each, may be used at any accredited college or university in the United States.

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

Why we need the Fair Tax

97%

of taxpayers will get a tax cut or pay no more than they do now.



3%

wealthiest will pay more on income over \$250,000 per year.

Whether you vote by mail or at the polls this fall, the first item on your ballot—even before the Presidential race—will be the Fair Tax constitutional amendment.

THE PROBLEM: THE OLD WAY IS BROKEN

The current tax system is unfair because when all taxes are considered, middle- and lower-income people pay more as a share of their income than wealthy people. That's wrong!

THE SOLUTION: FAIR TAX AMENDMENT

Fair Tax reform will make things fairer because it will:

- Require the top 3% wealthiest people to pay more on income over \$250,000 a year; and
- Cut taxes for those who make less than \$250,000. In all, 97% of taxpayers will get a tax cut or pay no more than they do now.

TAX FAIRNESS— AND FAIR FUNDING, TOO

The Fair Tax plan will generate more than \$3 billion a year, mostly from millionaires and billionaires. This money can be used to adequately fund schools, health care, other public services and jobs in every community.

HOW DO WE WIN FAIR TAX REFORM?

We win Fair Tax reform by voting YES for the constitutional amendment on the ballot this fall. A 'yes' vote of more than 50% of those voting in the election or more than 60% of those voting on the question is required for passage. So every vote matters! 🗳️

DON'T BE MISLED: GET THE FACTS!

The Fair Tax amendment is popular, necessary and the right thing to do. Opponents who want to avoid paying their share don't have good arguments against it, so instead they'll try to confuse voters about what fair tax reform will do. Here are the facts to fight back against their false attacks.

FALSE: "The Fair Tax is a tax increase on the middle class."

FACT: Everyone who makes less than \$250,000 gets a tax cut or pays the same as now.

FALSE: "The Fair Tax is a blank check for future tax increases."

FACT: Fair tax reform doesn't give legislators any more or less power to increase taxes than they've always had. But it gives them flexibility to change rates based on income, raising rates for wealthy people who can afford to pay a little bit more, and reducing rates for the middle class and those struggling to get there.

FALSE: "The Fair Tax is a tax on retirement income."

FACT: Illinois doesn't tax any retirement income such as 401(k), IRA, pension or Social Security benefits. Fair tax reform doesn't change that, period.

FALSE: "The Fair Tax could weaken the pension protection clause."

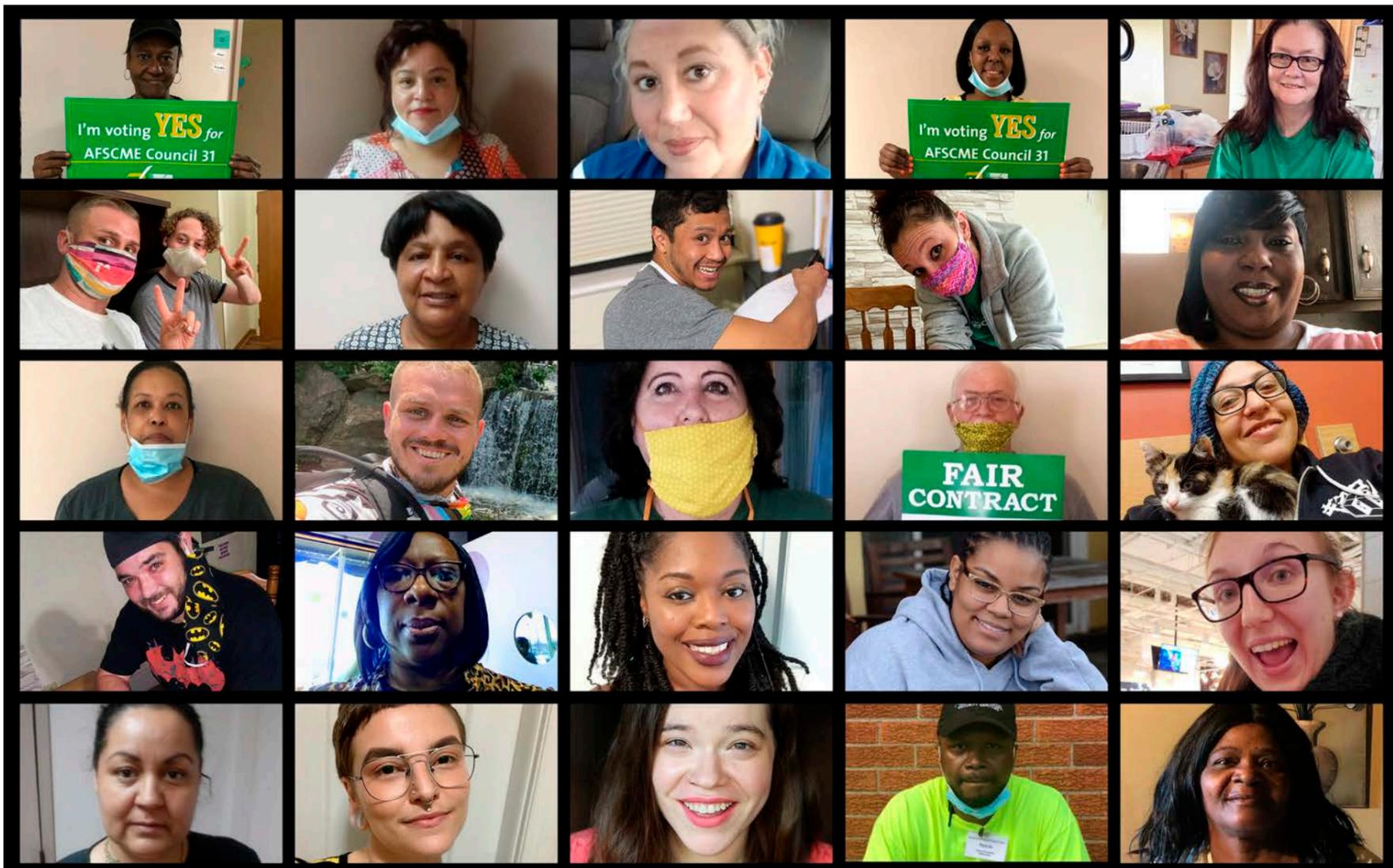
FACT: When the constitution is amended by a ballot question, **only the specific language in the ballot question** is affected.

FALSE: "Wealthy people will leave the state if they're finally forced to pay their share."

FACT: Most other states and the federal government already have a fair tax system, including neighbors like Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri. The fastest-growing Midwest state, Minnesota, does too. So does California, which has more millionaires than any other state.

FALSE: "There's a marriage penalty."

FACT: Under the Fair Tax plan, **if you make less than \$250,000 a year, your taxes will go down or stay the same**—whether you're single or married. 🗳️



Winning a union during a pandemic

Frontline workers need a union more than ever

Since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in Illinois, hundreds of workers from five different entities across the state joined the ranks of AFSCME Council 31. Safe and healthy working conditions has been their number one priority.

“Employers that were barely able to keep workers safe and function well were able to get by before the pandemic,” Council 31 Organizing Director Abbey Davis said. “Once COVID-19 hit, it exposed how management wasn’t funding safety measures or listening to workers on the front lines. All those things they refused to do were immediately and urgently exposed.”

Many of these workers provide human services or health care and so aren’t as able to work from home. While the employer depended on these employees to continue showing up every day despite the risks to their own health and that of their families, management was not valuing their input. They had no voice on the job.

So, they reached out to AFSCME.

Housekeepers at the College of DuPage, direct care

providers at Pathway in Springfield and Spring Creek Nursing and Rehab Center in Joliet, teachers and nurses at Broadstep Academy (formerly Willoglen Academy) in Freeport, and counselors at the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School (the “O School”) in Chicago all joined AFSCME Council 31 for a voice on the job to protect themselves and the individuals and communities they serve every day.

Organizing a union during a lockdown wasn’t easy: Face-to-face discussions are the bread and butter of any campaign to win a union in your workplace. But AFSCME organizers helped these employees come up with new solutions to get the job done.

“We used Zoom for our organizing committee meetings and electronic membership cards,” Davis said. “It turns out, if workers really want a

union, they figure out how to make it happen no matter the obstacles.”

There are also some positive sides to virtual meetings, Davis said. Employees needing to care for their children or who live far away can more easily participate in a video conference using their cellphone at home.

“In some cases, you can better participate in your union because you don’t have those barriers,” Davis said. “You miss some of the human connection, but you also gain participation.”

Union recognized

In a surprising turn of events, after initially resisting with typically anti-union tactics like captive audience meetings, management at the O School voluntarily recognized AFSCME Council 31 just after employees filed for a union election.

The O School is a residential treatment center and therapeutic school for children and adolescents with challenges such as autism or emotional and behavioral disorders. Once their union is certified, these 30 mental health counselors will head to the bargaining

table.

“The union will allow counselors and administration to work together to improve overall working conditions,” counselor Loren Sargent said. “The union will improve staff conditions, which will ultimately improve student conditions as well.”

“Our knowledge about and devotion to the residential program, in tandem with the power our union provides, will help keep our residential program and our residents safe and thriving,” agreed counselor Will Bartz.

Standing up for basic rights

“Some of us used to work at public schools where there was a union, so we thought, ‘Let’s try to see if we can form a teacher’s union here,’” said Amy King, a teacher at Broadstep Academy. “We wanted to make sure that we have everything we need to be able to do our job. Now we’re able to get our voices heard and have somebody consider what we’re saying.”

King said a union will help the teachers, nurses and clinicians at Broadstep provide better services for the young

people in their care.

“There are things that they need that we might be able to ask for now that didn’t seem possible before,” she said. “This is going to be a good thing for everybody.”

Jessica Shaw, a residential aide at Pathway for nine years said that the pandemic affected how they organized their union, but the employees actually faced a more typical obstacle: opposition from management.

“It was a struggle to get the word out there about AFSCME to the other staff because management was trying to stop us,” she said. “But our team did a good job and with everybody pitching in we were able to get the votes. Now, with AFSCME as our union, we can become stronger.”

Shaw said she and her co-workers are looking forward to negotiating for the things they have needed for a long time: wage increases, fair treatment and a voice on the job.

“Until AFSCME, I didn’t even know what a grievance was, I’d never heard of it,” Shaw said. “We have a lot of concerns, but nobody would ever listen to us. Now they have to. I see really good things coming in our future with AFSCME.”

Illinois expands vote by mail

Safe voting options increase during ongoing pandemic

On June 16, Governor JB Pritzker signed a law expanding the state's vote-by-mail program for the general election in November.

Election authorities must send vote-by-mail applications to every voter who participated in the 2018 general election, the 2019 municipal elections or the March 2020 primary election. That's five million voters.

The measure was backed by the entire labor movement to make voting safe and accessible for every citizen despite restrictions imposed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"In the face of a pandemic, massive economic upheaval, and renewed calls for racial justice, it's more important than ever that Illinoisans can hold accountable a truly representative and transparent government—and that means ensuring all eligible residents can wield their right to vote in a way that doesn't risk their personal health," Pritzker said.

"Sending vote-by-mail applications to residents who have participated in recent elections will allow more people to exercise that right from the safety of their own homes and help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities."

In the March primary election, a third of all votes came by mail because of voters wanting to avoid exposure to the coronavirus. Mailing the applications directly to eligible households will make the process both easier and safer.

The state is preparing for an even larger proportion in the November election. By mid-July, Chicago had already received a record 121,000 applications for mail-in ballots.

"Ballots will be mailed out beginning September 24," said Council 31 Intergovernmental Affairs Director Adrienne Alexander. "Don't wait to get your voice heard. Voters can submit their application for a mail-in ballot today."

Every voter counts

The day Pritzker signed the law, the Illinois State Board of Elections agreed to help local governments pay for expanded vote-by-mail and added safety precautions.

The law also makes a

1. REGISTER
Register to vote online by October 18 at ova.elections.il.gov

2. VOLUNTEER
Sign up to join our union's new virtual Get Out the Vote effort at AFSCME31.org/Volunteer

3. VOTE!

- Vote by Mail—request your ballot today!
- Vote Early in person—starts October 19

number of other changes. Election Day is now an Illinois state holiday; closing schools and local and state government buildings will allow them to safely host polling places.

And expanded early voting hours will help prevent overcrowding at the polls on Election Day. In-person early voting gets underway on October 19 and will be easier than ever. Early voting sites are required

to be open from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Local election authorities can also set aside special voting times for vulnerable populations and a curbside voting option will allow voters to cast a ballot without entering a polling place.

Registering to vote is streamlined so that when US citizens who will be 18 years

old by Nov. 3 register to vote online, they will be able to apply to vote by mail at the same time.

"Illinois should be proud of its efforts to expand vote-by-mail and other measures to ensure a high rate of participation in the November election," Alexander said. "AFSCME members will help ensure voters take advantage of these new opportunities." 

AFSCME RECOMMENDS JOE BIDEN FOR PRESIDENT



AFSCME for BIDEN

In March, the AFSCME International Executive Board voted unanimously to endorse Joe Biden for President in the 2020 general election. Council 31 Deputy Director and International Vice-President Mike Newman said that the IEB recognized the urgency of defeating Donald Trump, whose policies have tilted so heavily toward helping big business at the expense of working families.

"For decades, Joe Biden has been a champion for working people, the labor movement and public service workers," AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. "He shares our values, and he will fight for our voice on the job and our seat at the table. He has a gut-level understanding of the challenges and struggles keeping working families awake at night. He knows that the union difference means better jobs and stronger communities, an economy that extends opportunity to everyone, not just the wealthy and well-connected."

"Without apology, I am a union man," Biden said to AFSCME members. "Without AFSCME, without public employees, nothing functions. Everything that happens in the community depends on you. You provide the ability of people to live a decent middle-class life. We owe you."

AFSCME's legislative endorsements for Illinois contests are based on recommendations made by 11 regional PEOPLE committees made up of local union and retiree delegates. The committees review legislative voting records and responses to the union's candidate questionnaire, as well as conducting candidate interviews. These meetings were held virtually through the month of July.

Local union leaders from across the state will meet virtually on August 29 to finalize the union's endorsements, which will be posted online and in the next issue of *On the Move*. 

IF NOT US- THEN WHO?

- REP. JOHN LEWIS (1940-2020) -

In the wake of the George Floyd killing, and the massive, nationwide protests that followed, our country stands at a historic crossroads. With that death and the senseless deaths of so many other people of color, we have seen all too clearly and painfully the persistence of deeply ingrained racism in America. AFSCME has a long history of fighting for racial justice. We are called now to renew that commitment at this moment of national reckoning—to work, all of us together, to end systemic racism and to defend the dignity of every human being.

Members of the AFSCME Council 31 Executive Board share their thoughts on the challenges before us.



CHERYL GRAHAM

LOCAL 785, ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The murder of George Floyd moved me to tears. And it reopened a wound I have that has never healed. It reminded me of a pain that runs deep. It's a generational pain. My parents are from the Carolinas and over the years I've heard horrible stories. I know the history of the lynchings in the United States. So, I feel—and I bear witness to—the pain.

What's understood in my community, the black community, is that what happened to George Floyd could happen to any of us—male or female, young or old—at any time.

I am grateful for the use of cameras. They allowed everyone to see, from beginning to end, what happened to Mr. Floyd. The terror on his face; his pleas for mercy. He called his mama—I think that went to the heart of everyone. The bystanders pleading to the police to stop. And finally, we saw what appeared to be the satisfaction on the face of the police officer, Derek Chauvin, as he held his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck until it was over.

But I do have hope. And my hope is that his death will continue to move the world. We have seen actions and conversations and changes taking place in a way that I have never witnessed. I see young people standing up, leading and marching.

My hope is the same hope that I've always had: That we'll have equality—freedom and equality for all.



LLOYD MARSHALL, JR.

LOCAL 3477, COOK COUNTY JUVENILE PROBATION

These times have brought deeply embedded emotions out of me. We had to watch a grown man on national TV scream out for his mother and say I cannot breathe, you're killing me.

People need to realize that George Floyd was not the first person to go through this. I want to acknowledge all the George Floyds before the camera phones, before the videos. These things have been happening to black people—black men—for generations. Your father went through it, your grandfather went through it.

Police officers have been getting away with this kind of behavior for a long time. Laquan McDonald got shot 16 times. Breonna Taylor's killers—they haven't even been charged yet. They continue to do it.

Some people get mad when we say Black Lives Matter. But why can't we say that? They try to take the statement and say All Lives Matter. Yes indeed. We're saying all lives do matter. But the only people getting murdered, and beat, and their civil rights violated on the streets by police officers are black people. We're saying this injustice is happening.

I want to ask white people: Why stay silent? When you see your parents, your uncles, your cousins say something that's racist, you need to say something. Change comes in mysterious forms. You could be the light. If you really want to make a change, then come forward and join us and move forward with us. It's going to take all of us.

The protests are a wonderful thing if they can keep the momentum going. It's a rainbow of races coming together to say enough is enough. Like with the union, when we come together AFSCME Strong, we're not AFSCME black strong, AFSCME white strong, AFSCME Latino strong—we're not color-coded. We all wear that green.

If we come together in this world as one, we're going to be okay. I hope I see it in my lifetime. We've got to keep on striving.



CARLENE VAN DYKE

LOCAL 2615, ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

I thought I had a fairly good understanding of the civil rights movement and what people gained in that movement and what challenges were before us. Even though I knew we had a long way to go, I had no idea that it was as bad as it is.

But the killing of George Floyd truly made me understand that I have to take more personal responsibility; in educating myself, supporting Black Lives Matter, supporting a complete and utter change in our country. While it was tragic to see what happened to George Floyd, I have no doubt in my mind that that happens on a much more regular basis than many of us have been willing to admit.

I didn't have to talk to my boys about what to do when they get stopped by a police officer. Nobody should have to have those conversations with their children just because of the color of their skin. I know I have white privilege. That's the first step; you have to acknowledge that you do have privilege because of the color of your skin and that's not right. We can get through this, but it starts with acknowledgement that there's a problem and we all have to take ownership of it.

When I look at the marches today, I see the most diverse crowd of people. It's a movement that is much broader than the past. When you go



to any AFSCME event, you see the diversity of our union. And unions have been on the forefront of any positive social change we've had in this country. I'm proud to be part of an organization that I know will fight to be part of the changes that need to be made.



RALPH PORTWOOD

LOCAL 1866, STATEVILLE
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

We all saw a man being murdered on national news and social media. It's just un-American to see something like that happen. And the outpouring and the outrage is something that I haven't seen before. It was not only African Americans this time, it was everybody. A lot of different races, people saying that this is not acceptable.

I'm a father of two daughters. They're scared for their dad. They feel like, How can this happen? The police murdered someone with no remorse or concern.

The protests make me hopeful. I like the fact that the younger generation is leading the way. They're saying enough is enough. We're not going to stand for this anymore. It's time for things to change in this country.

Being a correctional officer for 23 years, I'm standing with the blue—as long as you're doing what you're supposed to do. Police officers should be held to a higher standard, we should be. George Floyd wasn't putting anybody in danger, he wasn't being a threat to a civilian or the police officers so why would that have to happen?

I'm hoping we see a change in November. This man has showed us he's not fit to be the leader of the free world or President of the United States. He hasn't done anything to bring this country together, he's only brought more dissension and hate. Everything he's doing shows us that he doesn't stand for working class people or what's best for America. He stands for what's best for Donald Trump and it's been that way since he took office. I hope in November everybody gets to the polls and lets their voices be heard. It's time for a change in America.

As trade unionists, it's time for us to stand up and make sure we're doing our part. This election is going to be the most important election of our lives. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure we make a change in 2020 for this country. That's my goal.



MIGUEL VAZQUEZ

LOCAL 3297, FOX METRO WATER
RECLAMATION DISTRICT

People have started to see that a certain race has been targeted by police and it's come to a point where enough is enough. People are coming together to peacefully protest world-wide.

For me and my family, my kids have seen it all on social media and the news. I have three kids, a 13-, a 10- and a seven-year-old. The little guys see police on the road, and they'll say, "Are they going to pull us over?" I try to explain to them just because there's a couple bad apples doesn't mean the whole bushel is bad. It doesn't mean all police officers are this way. They understand that. I'm the old-

est of five siblings and my youngest brother wants to become a police officer. He's on the right track. He takes to heart what he's sworn in for: to serve and protect.

We can't just sit back and let these things happen, we have to speak up and take action. And I think it starts at home with us as parents. Teaching our kids what's right from wrong. Teach them to take the right path and make the right decisions.

Solidarity is a powerful thing. When people come together and peacefully protest the wrongdoing of what certain police are doing, it's good. I agree with it. Just like with unions, we have to be strong for one another. Watch each other's back. We have to support each other.

AFSCME is a very diverse union. We have to support our brothers and sisters, no matter what color, what race, what their beliefs are. We can lead by example and show other people that we can work together, we can come together.



SHAUN DAWSON

LOCAL 2073, LOGAN
CORRECTIONAL CENTER

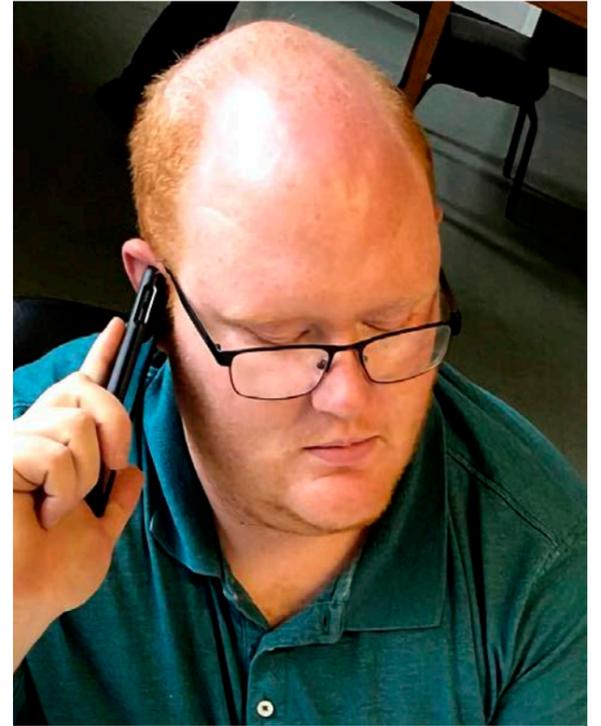
In order to overcome the barriers of our cultural, racial national divide, we have to address the adversities that group experienced. Though we have acknowledged the past, we haven't identified a solution to resolve or move forward from that past.

How do we heal the wounds of the past so society as a whole can move forward together? How do we create an environment where we can interact peacefully and understand each other's problems?

The true point of the Black Lives Matter movement is that all of us need to understand and pay attention to a very real problem and mutually come together with a very real solution.

One of our union brothers often says, "Do better, people." It's not just a phrase, it's a challenge. How do we as people do better? What can we do to be better and what can we do as a group to make things better for others? That's the stance of AFSCME: How do we make it better for our members? How do we make it better for the society that we represent? And how do we as a union mutually work together to find that resolve?

The questions and problems will never end, it's a matter of how we deal with them. When it comes to AFSCME—and unions as a whole—adversity is what keeps us together. And diversity is what helps us solve the problems. Without adversity there would be no need for a union. And without diversity we would never solve a problem for everyone, it would only be solved for one particular entity. 



Members of AFSCME locals across the state urged their legislators to support funding for workers' wages and benefits during the pandemic.

Grassroots lobbying secures gains for frontline workers

Budget funds DSP wage increases, expands unemployment and workers comp

The pandemic has wreaked havoc with public sector budgets. It's required large increases in public spending while tax revenues are dropping. Tens of millions of workers have filed unemployment claims in the United States and many economists believe that the worst is yet to come.

Yet despite all the pressures on the Illinois state budget, AFSCME members successfully lobbied their legislators to push for important economic gains and increased protections for workers.

More progress on fair wages

Direct service professionals—DSPs—at community disability agencies have long fought for fair pay for the vital work

they do. AFSCME has led the charge in Springfield and made incremental gains in recent years despite great obstacles. This year, before the pandemic hit, Gov. JB Pritzker's budget proposal included an additional \$1.50 per hour for these front-line employees.

But by the time the Illinois General Assembly considered the proposal, new challenges posed by the pandemic faced the state and the funding was far from secure.

AFSCME members went to work. Hundreds of DSPs made calls to their legislators to remind them of the critical

importance of the work they do for individuals with disabilities—especially in the time of COVID-19. In fact, some employees began living in the group homes to protect residents from the virus.

Roosevelt Journigans, president of AFSCME Local 2690, was featured in a *Chicago Sun-Times* article headlined, "Forget 24/7, it's now 24/30—or longer—for some who take care of developmentally disabled: 'Basically, we are their family.'"

An employee at Trinity Services Inc. in Joliet, Journigans volunteered to be

part of the agency's stay-in-place staffing system where employees lived in the facility for 30-45 days at a time. The May 12 story was perfectly timed to highlight the dire need for increased pay to retain qualified staff.

"We've lost so many fabulous workers, and the only reason they left was because of money," Journigans said, referring to substandard wages for DSPs. "Now I see in the paper they're saying people are 'essential,' but they're the same people that when we're trying to get the wages up to \$15 an hour, they say we're

MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE CALL AT A TIME



Catina Barnett
Local 1275 President,
Bus Driver at
Rockford Public Schools

How did you hear about AFSCME's campaign to expand unemployment insurance to educational employees over the summer months?

I was the start of it! Sharon Holloway [president of Local 3210, nutrition services employees at Rockford Public Schools] and I had a talk one night and we realized we were going to have a problem. Our members are used to working summer school, odds and ends at the school district and the park district, at stores and restaurants. [The pandemic] was a major blow [to this income]. We said to each other, "How do we fix this?" One thing led to another and the conversation began.

What does the law change mean to you and your co-workers?

Financial security. That's a big one. No worries, no stress. I've been on the job 21 years and

I've never received unemployment. This was a major milestone. This law affects all 10-month employees, union and non-union. It affected people in other cities that didn't even know this was going to happen. I can say I'm very proud of my members who helped get unemployment benefits for so many people. It's a major, major relief.

Your region made the most calls to legislators. How does it feel to have made a difference?

It feels amazing, honestly. Amazing to know that making phone calls and pushing the envelope gets things started. Communication is key. I told our membership: "We have a chance of getting this. If you make a phone call it could happen. Let's try it."

Without our union this would never have happened. No doubt there. 

not worth that.”

Because of the media attention and grassroots lobbying this session and in recent years, the final budget included the governor’s original proposal of a \$1.50 increase, phased in over the next six months.

Now DSPs will need to put in more work to ensure that funding goes directly to frontline wages. Guidance from the Department of Human Services to employers stated: “DHS expects providers to use the increase to meet area minimum wage pressures and to address the DSP and frontline staff workforce crisis.”

“But we know from past experience that employers will want to put part of this money toward other purposes, ranging from employee health care costs to facility operations,” Council 31 Special Projects Director Meg Lewis said. “We will have to continue our fight at the bargaining table to ensure that frontline employees get the pay increases they deserve.”

Expanded unemployment benefit

As non-instructional education employees across the state have had to cope with the new challenges and demands imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, they also had to worry about making it through the summer months without any income.

“Normally on Eastern Illinois University’s campus we have camps in the summer, so the majority of our dining staff work all summer,” said AFSCME Local 981 President Renee Kurz. “But with COVID, a lot of us were off since spring break and everyone was laid off by May 8. That’s a lot of employees with no income and no way to get an income.”

That’s why AFSCME launched a campaign to change the law that blocked these educational employees from receiving unemployment insurance (UI) benefits when they were laid off over the summer. AFSCME members made hundreds of calls to legislators to urge passage of this bill in the General Assembly, and the union’s legislative team played a critical role in crafting and passing the legislation.

“We sent a mass email

to all our members on campus, asked them to call their legislators and have family members call too, trying to make everybody vote our way because it was very needed,” Kurz said.

It worked. On June 5, Gov. JB Pritzker signed into law the AFSCME-backed HB 2455, which removes the prohibition against non-instructional education employees receiving unemployment benefits when they are laid off during the

“Constituent lobbyists are one of our most powerful tools.”

2020 summer months. As a result, thousands of AFSCME members who work for school districts and universities qualify for UI benefits this summer so they can make ends meet for their families. And, through the end of July, UI benefits were increased by \$600 per week because of a change in federal law.

“It was a great fight to fight for and it’s a blessing,” Kurz said. “People never missed a paycheck. It was great and it never would have happened without AFSCME pushing for it.”

In addition, the law provides more than \$2 billion in new federal funding, an additional seven benefit weeks in the state extended benefit plan and non-charging for employers’ COVID-19 related unemployment insurance experiences to help the economic recovery efforts.

The new law also amends the state’s Workers’ Compensation Act to expand access to benefits for first responders and frontline workers stricken with COVID-19. It presumes that essential workers who contract COVID-19 did so because of their employment and makes this standard retroactive to the start of the pandemic.

Grassroots power

“These critical changes to our state laws would not have been possible without the grassroots advocacy of AFSCME members and the diligence of our legislative lobbying team,” said



SESSION BRINGS GOOD NEWS: BUDGET, LEGISLATIVE GAINS

There’s a lot to cheer in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget signed by Gov. JB Pritzker, as well as in several other measures passed during a spring session that lasted barely a week due to the coronavirus pandemic—including four standout achievements that directly impact AFSCME members.

No layoffs slated

The budget plan averts layoffs in state government—a looming threat over these past months as the state budget hole grew ever larger as a result of the pandemic.

Instead, Gov. Pritzker proposed borrowing from the Federal Reserve to tide our state over. There’s still an urgent need for a more durable budget fix—and that will require direct federal assistance, such as the HEROES Act now before Congress, as well as approval by voters in November of the governor’s Fair Tax initiative.

Investment in the vulnerable

One of the most positive changes to come out of the budget was funding for much-needed wage increases for frontline caregivers at state-funded community agencies serving people with disabilities. The state also increased funding toward community-based agencies where AFSCME members care for and educate vulnerable children and youth.

For years, AFSCME has led the fight for fair wages for these essential workers. These investments are one more step toward that goal.

Summer unemployment insurance benefit

Another big breakthrough for AFSCME members was the passage of HB 2455, which removes the prohibition against non-instructional education employees receiving unemployment insurance benefits when they are laid off during the 2020 summer months.

That means thousands of AFSCME members who work for school districts and universities have been able to qualify for unemployment this summer.

Local government relief

The FY 21 budget also brings the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) back to its historic level, providing local cities and counties across Illinois with a significant revenue boost. These funds are needed more than ever as cash-strapped local governments are turning to tax hikes, service cuts and layoffs to address gaping budget holes. 🦋

Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “As AFSCME has for decades, our union will continue to fight for the rights of all workers during this unprecedented time.”

“Constituent lobbyists are one of our most powerful tools as a union,” Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said.

“Individual testimonies

make a scenario real for lawmakers. It puts a face on the issue and reminds them that there are human lives in the balance. That makes a real difference.” 🦋

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Emergency responders at AFSCME Local 2817 united to win new contracts with improved wages and working conditions.

Essential emergency workers make gains

AFSCME LOCAL 2817 IS MADE up of three Emergency Medical Services (EMS) units at the City of O'Fallon, the City of Columbia and Monroe County.

The three units are close. Many of the union members work full-time for one chapter and part-time for another as their schedule allows for a second job (employees work more than 24 hours in a row, then have several days off). Together they are making gains to ensure fair wages for all EMS workers in the local.

This spring, in the midst of the state shutdown, the O'Fallon and Columbia chapters each negotiated new three-year contracts when their members were facing higher safety risks than ever.

Parity for EMS

Local President Patrick Battoe and Council 31 Staff Representative Patricia Rensing led negotiations for O'Fallon, along with bargaining team members Jason Butler and Vice President

“Not knowing what we’re walking into, we deal with that every day. There is no routine call.”

Marty Nungesser. Together, they were able to secure a three-year agreement with 3% wage increases each year and no change to health care premiums.

The city is growing, with two new hospitals and a cancer center, and call volumes are up. In the 2019 legislative session in Springfield, Battoe had testified to the General Assembly about the importance of grouping EMS with police units to provide interest arbitration as a failsafe option in negotiations and help elevate EMS workers to the same level as police officers.

“We are equal units, we both provide an essential service to the public,” Rensing said. “The dangers are the same and with the pandemic, EMS workers face even more exposure to COVID-19. It’s only right we’re treated equally.”

Both teams were able to maintain social distancing restrictions by negotiating

largely over email, phone and Zoom video conferences. The Columbia chapter achieved a lot at the bargaining table to ensure fair pay—“we knocked it out of the park” said Rensing—even though the bulk

of negotiations was done virtually.

Rensing again led negotiations, this time with Chapter Chair Mike Evans taking the lead with assistance from bargaining team member Justin Lauf. The team was able to increase the first-year wage floor, realizing a 6% increase plus 2.75% bumps in the second and third years of the agreement.

“Bargaining went really, really well considering what is

going on,” Evans said. “Illinois is doing the stepped approach to increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in 2025, so we put things in place to make sure the EMTs stay above minimum wage, with substantial wage increases for both part-time and full-time members, and established longevity pay in the contract.”

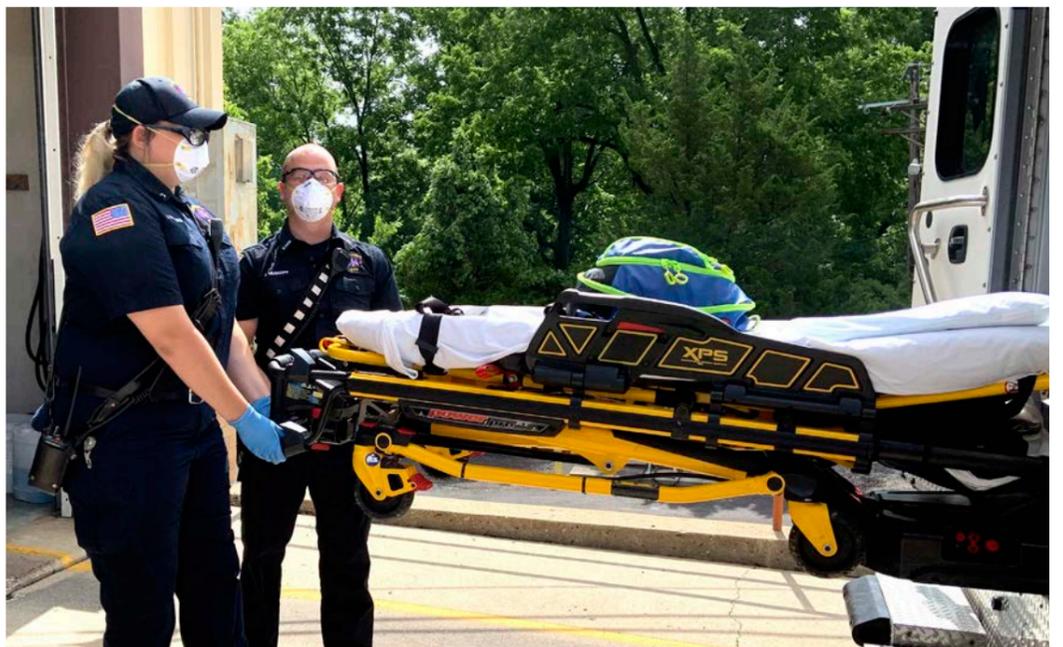
Working in a pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was slower to reach central and southern Illinois, but now the risks to AFSCME members on the front lines are great.

“We are starting to see another surge down here now,” Evans said, who has worked in EMS for 10 years. “Not knowing what we’re walking into, we deal with that every day. There is no routine call. But COVID-19 adds another layer of uncertainty on top of uncertainty.”

EMS employees come into every call with gloves as they always have, but now an N-95 mask and eye covering (goggles or a face shield) are required. If the patient meets criteria to be a “person under investigation” for COVID-19, the workers wear a full body gown for protection. Increased cleaning measures have been put in place to protect both patients and staff.

“We made a lot of good changes in our contracts,” Evans said. “It showed that the cities are willing to invest in EMS for the future. They understand we need more compensation for what we’re doing.”



Emergency workers like AFSCME Local 2817 members serve on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Creating balance for home health visiting

AFSCME LOCAL 2342 MEMBERS at Presence AMITA home care won a three-year agreement that boosted wage rates with 2.75% annual increases—plus made significant progress in negotiating a more reasonable workload.

“The AFSCME 2342 team worked to negotiate the best language, spell out benefits in our contract, and make improvements in every area possible for all employees represented,” said a statement from the bargaining committee.

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen, former president Harald Anonsen served on the bargaining committee with new local president Allison Hoehn, Laura Robertson and Marianne Vidal. Anonsen is now retired after 23-year career at the center.

“We accomplished a lot, especially when it comes to working conditions,” Anonsen said. “In home care, our job is not nine to five. People are putting in 10-12 hours a day and we wanted to take some pressure off them.”

Worker productivity is weighted by points at AMITA. These health care professionals work one-on-one with patients in their homes and their workday includes a lot of travel and administrative work. Every piece of work has a set point amount. For example, there are more than 100 pages of computer work required for one kind of home visit. It used to count for two points, but the bargaining team was able to get it up to three points. That’s an important change when each employee needs six points a day.

“Salaries are not necessarily the top of our list,” Anonsen said. “We had much longer discussions about working conditions, the point system and the expectations. We care about the balance between our personal life and our professional life, and about patient safety.”

Anonsen said having a union—the local’s first contract was in 2013—has made a “huge difference” in the working lives of Local 2342 members.

“We’re way more protected,” he said. “You know what your raise is going to be, fair and square. Working



MEETING SAFELY

AFSCME members are often meeting by phone or videoconference during the pandemic. If your local has face-to-face discussions, be sure to practice safe social distancing. Stay six feet apart and wear a mask—just like these AFSCME members of Local 3210 (top) and Local 692 (bottom).

conditions have definitely improved and our salaries too. I know we wouldn’t be where we’re at today if it had not been for AFSCME. I think everybody deserves a union.”

McHenry County circuit clerks join AFSCME, win contract

THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 1748—circuit clerks at McHenry County—won their first union contract and ratified it unanimously in June. It was a long road. The unit was first represented by another union, but when those

negotiations stalled, the bargaining team reached out to AFSCME.

They looked to AFSCME after seeing the results Local 1748 had achieved for union members in the probation department and for county clerks.

“We were hoping for a change and that’s what AFSCME brought,” said bargaining team member Heather Thome. “A lot of change for us.”

Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis led negotiations with Thome, Colleen Sklar and Bridget Cole on the team.

“We are bringing to you a contract that promises real gains in wages, improving our benefit choices, and other important gains in workplace

protections—all enforceable through a grievance process ending in legally binding arbitration,” the team said in a statement to members. “With ratification, we take an important step to become financially more in line with other circuit clerk offices in the collar counties.”

“We did a great job,” Thome said proudly. “Our starting rate went up \$2 an hour in the middle of a pandemic. Everyone received a \$1.50 to \$2 raise. We switched unions right in the middle and we got done in six months with AFSCME what the other union didn’t get done in more than a year—and with more money.”

The team also made changes to bereavement time,

added a step in paid sick time, changed the way vacancies are filled, improved layoff language and maintained health insurance rates. They were also able to secure time-and-a-half for overtime on the weekends and retroactive pay back to 2018.

The ratification meeting was held over Zoom with an impressive turnout from the membership. The contract was ratified with a 100% yes vote via an anonymous online survey.

“Everyone was very excited about this contract,” Thome said. “It’s much stronger and better, I really can’t complain about one thing.”

But she also knows that AFSCME never quits: “Will we be asking for more next time? Of course.”

AFSCME Free College Benefit opens doors



colleges in Ohio’s university system—AFSCME members and their children or step-children, grandchildren or step-grandchildren, spouses, domestic partners, siblings, parents and financial dependents are eligible to apply.

For the associate’s degree, 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, cybersecurity, finance, marketing, human resources and more.

Any IDOC 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.

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

Four-year degree

AFSCME’s online bachelor’s degree completion program will cost a fraction of regular college tuition. The program allows union members and their families 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.

Visit bachelorsdegree.afscme.org for more information. 

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—and now a bachelor’s degree at little to no cost.

Through partnerships with Eastern Gateway Community

College and Ohio’s Central State University—accredited

“TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY”

Maria Perez is a clerk IV-timekeeper in the City of Chicago’s Department of Aviation and a member of AFSCME Local 2946. She recently completed her associate degree through the AFSCME Free College benefit.

How did you hear about the program?

I had never been in a union before so when I became an AFSCME member I wanted to learn all about our agreement. I would come home every day after work and read a few pages. One day I bumped into the free college opportunity and it sparked my interest right away.

I always thought it was a great idea to go back to college. You have more opportunities with a college degree. I was still a little skeptical, so I told myself I’m just going to try it. It was really hard to believe that it was free.

Well, I tried it and here I am finishing up my associate degree two years later!

Was it really free?

It was! I’m happy to say that it was. The only thing you may need to buy is a computer or laptop. Everything else is provided by the school.

The teachers were very helpful, anything that you need you send an email and they’re happy to help. The school also offers mentoring with other students and with teachers if you need assistance. They offer a lot of support to the students.

What was the best part?

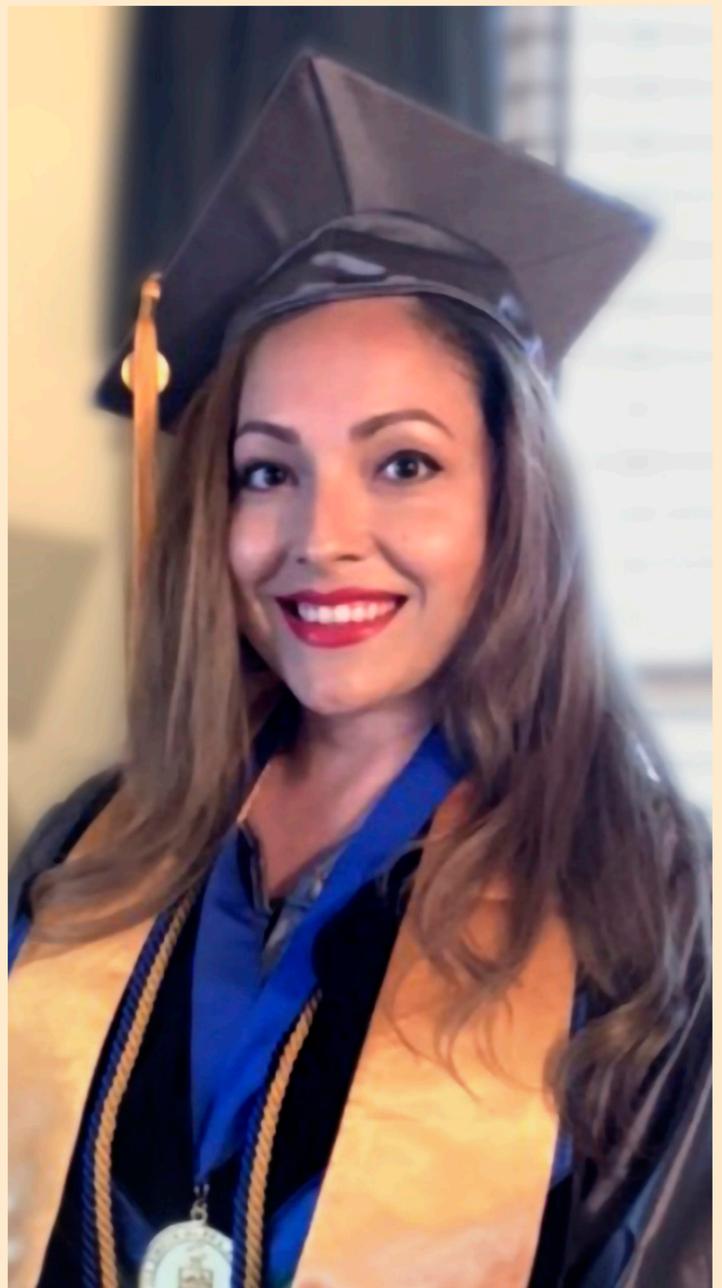
The best part was that I’m able to do it at my own pace, at my own time.

Would you recommend the program to other AFSCME members?

I’d highly recommend this program to anyone who wants to finish their degree to give it a try. Stop thinking too much and just do it. It can get a little hard and you can get stressed out but if you motivate yourself and celebrate every achievement that will help you take the next step.

How did it feel to go back to school and get your degree?

It’s wonderful. I’m very happy. I’m very much looking forward to trying the new opportunity, the bachelor’s degree. I think it’s a wonderful opportunity for AFSCME members. Whoever came up with this idea, thank you. 



RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME family mourns passing of retiree activist Charlie Hogan.

Chapter 31 loses a champion

THIS PAST MARCH, AFSCME Chapter 31 Executive Board member Charlie Hogan passed away. He was not only an exemplary retiree leader but also a passionate activist for working people.

Charlie joined AFSCME Retirees in 1997. Soon after, Chapter 31 began organizing a sub-chapter in the north suburbs of Cook County. Charlie took part from the start and was elected to be the first president of Northern Cook County's sub-chapter 161, a post he held until his death.

Charlie was well-known for his determination to stand up against injustice and engage members and the community at large to stand up for the powerless. His enthusiasm and kindness were a bright spot for many and will be irreplaceable.

Stay safe! Nursing home precautions

NURSING HOMES HAVE BEEN hit the hardest by COVID-19. As of the end of June, 55% of the deaths in Illinois have been nursing home residents and staff. Yet adequate resources have not been provided to fix the systemic problems.

constant short-staffing—with an average 30% turnover rate in a typical year. This situation has understandably left both residents and staff angry, anxious and scared.

Chapter 31 has been working in conjunction with the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans to address the needs of residents and staff and educate residents and families about their rights.

Retirees take action during pandemic

WHILE CHAPTER 31 sub-chapters have suspended in-person meetings due to the high risk COVID-19 poses to seniors, members have still been active. AFSCME retirees have been making masks, working with charities and supporting essential workers in a variety of ways.

"I started making masks to help protect the people I care about from this pandemic," said Marcia Little, president of the Kane County sub-chapter. "After graduating from Sauk Valley College's nursing program, I was hired as a new graduate nurse by Community General Hospital (CGH) in Sterling, so it seemed a no-brainer when the call came for volunteers to make masks for CGH staff that I would help."

Little has been joined by many other members, including those in Jacksonville and

Ottawa, who have been making masks to help essential health care workers while staying safely at home.

Jay Ferraro, president of the Rockford-area sub-chapter, volunteered to deliver food to local families in need through a partnership with Rockford United Labor. "I know that many people have lost their jobs and the need is great," said Ferraro, "but there were no volunteers to distribute food in

The sub-chapter in Dixon voted to spend \$500 to provide 200 meals to all staff at Mabley Developmental Center. They coordinated with a local restaurant, Oliver's Market, to provide bagged meals and split the cost evenly with the restaurant.

Other sub-chapters, like those based in Chester, have sent money and food to local area charities and food pantries. "We understand that



Retirees Jay Ferraro and Marcia Little safely stay active with AFSCME.

the area where I live. I felt comfortable stepping up because I knew how to protect myself and others by wearing a mask, contacting folks by phone and leaving the food on the front porch or stoop to maintain social distancing."

many people cannot stay at home during this time and others are facing the loss of their jobs and serious financial hardship," said Little. "So if there's any way those of us who have security can help, we want to do that." 🦋



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Here are some steps you can take to protect your loved ones in long-term care facilities:

- Ask the facility to provide updates on loved ones and whom you should contact if you have questions.
- Ask the administrator to seek permission from the families of other residents to share their email addresses. Families can create a group email and use it to communicate with other family members, bring questions and concerns to the facility or the Ombudsman program, or provide support to one another.
- Find out what steps the facility is taking to keep residents safe. Request that the administrator tell families how the facility performed on its self-assessment.
- Request the facility set up a schedule for when you can connect with your loved one by phone, video, "window visiting" or other methods.
- Speak up about care and rights violations with facility administration, staff and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, which provides advocacy for residents, at aging.slitcoprogram@illinois.gov.



out there than that Instagram picture.

We're here to help people form a connection to outdoor spaces and that helps them want to protect

those areas that are so important and vital to our ecosystem. It seems like people are bombarded by negative information about the outdoors. There's misinformation and fear—whether it's murder hornets or venomous snakes or poisonous plants—[and] we're here to dispel those myths.

No one should be afraid to go outside; it's the best place ever.

What can visitors expect at our state parks during the pandemic?

We're following all the guidelines from our governor and the CDC, like staying six feet apart from each other and wearing a mask when that's not possible. We require people to wear masks indoors. When they're out hiking, if a family pulls up and a trailhead is packed full of cars, maybe pick a different trail until it's cleared out a little bit. Make sure you're giving people space and respecting that distance and wearing masks when that's not possible.

It's really important for people to get out in nature, now more than ever. There's a lot of negativity spiraling around and it's extremely overwhelming, especially for people who spend a lot of time on social media. It can be depressing. You're secluded, stuck inside, bom-

“To see eyes light up when people make that cool nature connection.... That's my motivation.

barded by this negative information. Getting outside and disconnecting from all of that, even just for a little while, is very beneficial for physical and mental health as well. It's important to stay updated but also important for people to give themselves time to relax and unwind.

Lately, I've never in my life seen so many families out picnicking. It's beautiful. It's so wonderful to see so many people out enjoying the outdoors. We have a lot more campers, hikers and picnickers, kids playing in the creek. It makes me so happy to see. If there's been any good [from the pandemic], it's that more people are spending time outdoors. My big hope is that it will continue. 

Jennifer Randolph-Bollinger

AFSCME Local 1048

NATURAL RESOURCES COORDINATOR, GIANT CITY STATE PARK, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Tell us about your job at Giant City State Park.

I have the best job in the entire world. I'm the Natural Resources Coordinator, which is a fancy way of saying the park naturalist or park nature nerd. It's my job to help people form meaningful connections to the outdoors.

A huge part of my job is talking with people. With COVID, that makes my job a little tricky. Due to safety issues we've had to get creative with how we're communicating with our visitors. There are only eight of us [naturalists] statewide and we've been getting together via Zoom to discuss how we can best serve the public in this time. We decided that informational videos giving a general idea of what we have to offer in the park would have to suffice until we can speak face-to-face.

Now that we've reached phase four, we opened the Visitors' Center with restrictions. It really has been nice to actually talk to people again.

How does being a union member help you in your work?

It's been really good knowing that I have a support system in my union. These really are uncertain times and knowing my union's got my back if I need them, that I have safe and dependable employment, I can relax a little bit. There's a lot of other things to worry about right now and as an AFSCME union member, my job isn't one of them. I feel fortunate to be a union member when so many other people are not and are having such a hard time right now.

Why should people visit Giant City State Park?

It's absolutely gorgeous. The state topography magically transforms down here in Southern Illinois. We've got Shawnee National Forest, US Fish and Wildlife Service, lakes, rivers, hills, bluffs, swamps, just about every kind of ecosystem you could possibly want. It's a magical fairyland; it's breathtaking. And of course, every season offers something completely different.

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

I love the opportunity to share my deep love of nature. People come and they want to hear from me. To see eyes light up when people make that cool nature connection, see the excitement when they hear a bird call that belongs to a spectacular woodpecker or pick up a toad for the first time, the surprise when they smell a spice bush or sassafras leaf. That's my motivation.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

Interpreters and park naturalists are the face of the park. We help people gain a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Now more than ever that's so important. With technology, the gap between people and the outdoors is growing. A lot of people just want a quick hike to the prettiest waterfall or rock formation to get that Instagram picture. So I say while you're out, keep your eyes peeled for this beautiful lily or warbler—there's a lot more