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AFSCME Council 5 Supports Call for Statewide Mask Policy

As cases of COVID-19 rise across the country and in Minnesota, Executive Director Julie Bleyhl announced Council 5's official support for a statewide policy requiring face masks.

"Masks are not political; their use is based on science," said Bleyhl. "Front line workers have always been the backbone of our society and economy, and they demand safe and healthy communities. All of us wearing a mask when we are in public moves us towards these goals."

In recent days, the Minnesota Department of Health has reported a large spike in positive COVID-19 cases, specifically over 800 new cases in a 24-hour period, the greatest daily spike we have seen in 7 weeks.

Governor Tim Walz is considering a statewide mask policy to protect public health. "We would support this policy and thank Governor Walz for his continued leadership," said Bleyhl.

Minnesota would be far from an outlier in requiring face masks to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Twenty-three states already have

similar mandates in place. In Minnesota, local officials and large organizations have already begun to implement mandatory mask policies, including Duluth, Rochester, Mankato, Edina, Winona, as well as Metropolitan State University, the University of Minnesota - Duluth.

Both medical and non-medical grade masks reduce the spread of COVID-19. A mask mandate would be a small price to pay, given the havoc that COVID-19 has already wrought on our communities, families, workplaces, economy, and sense of normalcy. Outbreaks in our state prisons, group homes, long-term care facilities, food processing plants, and every Minnesota county already pose significant challenges, and larger outbreaks would push our strained systems to a breaking point.

While the federal government refuses to act and produce PPE, public employees face increasing risk of infection while providing the services our communities desperately need. By wearing a mask in public, we can protect our brothers and sisters in labor while improving public health for all Minnesotans.

For those who have received AFSCME-branded masks, please send an email to communications@afscmemn.org and show your solidarity! Order details for AFSCME-branded masks have been forwarded to local presidents.

"When we all wear masks to slow the virus' transmission and it is under control, we are fully confident that working people will meet the challenge of rebuilding our economy and systems rooted in social, racial, and economic justice," said Bleyhl.



Join our 2020 victory phone banks!

Help Elect Labor Champions with Virtual Phone Banks!

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much in our world, but one thing remains certain: union members need to get out the vote. AFSCME Council 5 has endorsed a slate of labor champions that will be powerful advocates for working families if elected. But without our support, they may lose their races to anti-union, corporate allies who will support their wealthy donors and vote in lock-step with Trump's harmful agenda.

Though we're not canvassing in person to protect members and the public, AFSCME members across the country are burning up the phones to elect our endorsed candidates. Beginning on July 22, Council 5 will host virtual phone banks every Wednesday and Thursday at 6pm and Saturday at 1pm for members from every corner of our state to join and participate! We have a lot of work to do to elect pro-worker candidates. We need your help!

Check out our Facebook page @AFSCMEMN5 to sign up for a phone bank in your area. Zoom info will be provided for a training and the phone bank itself.

All are welcome and encouraged to volunteer to flip the MN Senate, keep a pro-worker majority in the MN House, and elect our endorsed federal candidates.

See you there!



Gov. Walz is considering a statewide mask policy. AFSCME Council 5 supports this proposal.

Public Employees Need Deficiency Funding - Fast

AFSCME members are on the front lines protecting and supporting Minnesotans through the COVID-19 pandemic. But budget deficiencies threaten their livelihoods, health, and safety. That's why AFSCME Council 5 supports legislation calling for deficiency funding of \$11.7 million to the Dept. of Corrections and \$25 million to the Dept. of Human Services' Direct Care and Treatment programs.

We need YOU to call your legislators and ask them to support these proposals for deficiency funding.

Minnesota's correctional facilities are already short-staffed, ill-equipped, and plagued by COVID-19 infections. Without deficiency funding, the MN Department of Corrections (DOC) will lay off more workers, making the facilities less safe for inmates, workers, and the surrounding communities.

Meanwhile, shortages in the The Department of Human Services' Direct Care and Treatment (DCT) division would leave vulnerable Minnesotans without resources at a time when they can least afford to lose them. DCT services provide care to people with complex needs like mental health, dementia, and Alzheimer's. Private companies often refuse to take on these challenging cases, meaning that they have nowhere else to turn if the state cannot provide care.

The federal government has yet to take on their responsibility to fund the front lines. In the absence of federal leadership, AFSCME members and the people we serve need the Minnesota Legislature to step up and provide deficiency funding for our most essential public services.

Minnesotans deserve high-quality public services - especially while a global pandemic threatens every aspect of normal life. **Tell your legislators: now is the time to invest in public services** and pass deficiency funding.

Find your legislator here:
gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts
 Call your legislator here:
leg.state.mn.us/leg/legdir
Stand up for public workers - demand deficiency funding NOW!

Hennepin County Workers Win Class Action Grievance

As Hennepin County workers made the difficult choice to utilize COVID-related leaves in order to care for their loved ones, they noticed a problem: Hennepin County consistently failed to continue their accruals. While using their earned leave benefits, the employer was punishing workers by withholding the accruals they fought for in their contract.

So Hennepin County members filed a class action grievance demanding that the employer abide by the contract. They stood together - and they won!

Because they fought back, 850 Hennepin County employees (and counting) will get the accruals they deserve. Their efforts are a perfect example of what happens when AFSCME members stand up to improve the lives of all workers.

Congratulations on your victory, family!



Hennepin County workers filed a class action grievance - and won!

More Weekly Mental Health Check-Ins

AFSCME members have organized a weekly mental health check-in that brings together union members and perfect strangers to break down barriers, get to know one another, and share their stories.

Members now host weekly virtual check-ins every Tuesday morning at 9am and Tuesday evenings at 7pm. These meetings provide a safe and private space for everybody to come together and share their hopes of what a better, modernized mental health system can look like. They hope to expand to more days and times.

Please join us in this movement. You can go to the AFSCME Council 5 website here: [afscmemn.org/mentalbehavioral-health](https://www.afscmemn.org/mentalbehavioral-health) for more information on their work and join the weekly check-in.

Resources for Members

Stay up to date on all the latest news by following @afscmemn5 on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Get guidance and resources at [afscmemn.org](https://www.afscmemn.org) under the COVID-19 tab.

Look for action alerts via email and text so you know when to take action to protect working families. We are all in this together, siblings.