

OCTOBER 9, 2024

AFSCME Hennepin County Locals

Hello AFSCME Local 34, 552, 1719, 2864 and 2938 Union Members!

As you may be aware, the Hennepin County AFSCME Locals have been at the negotiating table for the last couple of months bargaining for our next contract! During that time, we have had lots of discussion regarding what is important to our members. Health care, wages, and language proposals, among many others, have been proposed at the table. These conversations bring about a range of ideas, some that we all may or may not agree with. We would like to address some of the concerns that have been raised while in discussion around these ideas and actions.

After six weeks, we had barely had any movement on our contract proposals. On August 23, 2024, our six AFSCME locals came to the table to discuss our health care. We reached a tentative agreement (TA) just after 11am on the premium splits that are currently in our contract (3% for single employees, 17% for employee + child and employee + spouse, and 15% for family coverage), in addition to No Premium Holidays, and an agreement to impact bargaining if/when HC changes their TPA (third party administrator). Council 5 representatives notified Labor Relations that there was a TA on health care, and Local 2822's Chief Steward was present along with the other Local Presidents when our lead union negotiator announced the TA and we all shook hands with the Chief Labor Relations Officer. The six-local coalition clearly and unambiguously had reached an agreement with regard to health insurance.

The six AFSCME local coalition took a break, and then came back to caucus just after 1pm. Locals 34, 552, 1719, 2864, and 2938 expressed significant concern with how Local 2822 members were conducting themselves inside and outside of the bargaining table. The other five locals had grave concerns about being able to continue at the table together. In prior caucus sessions, Local 2822 members engaged in name-calling and other abusive behavior toward their coalition partners. There was also concern about if we shared the same goals and could even reach a good contract together since our expectations were so different.

As a result, Locals 34, 552, 1719, 2864, and 2938 all announced that their locals were withdrawing from the coalition with Local 2822. Local 2822 started to pack up their belongings to leave the room while this discussion was still going on, and the discussion turned to informing Labor Relations. It was decided that the Presidents and the lead union negotiator would meet with Labor Relations in the hall to inform them of the coalition breaking. The Chief Steward and President of Local 2822 attended that informal meeting. Local 2822 informed Labor Relations that they were leaving the coalition and did not agree to the previously agreed upon TA on healthcare. Per notes from the team after locals expressed that they wanted to leave the coalition that afternoon:

2822 voted and lost this morning. We make concessions when we lose. You wanted to get this through before you left, and we might have had different options. You came this morning; knew you were going to do this...

---President Ali Fuhrman, Local 2822

There has also been miscommunication from Local 2822 around the consensus process and how we ended up with \$500/1000 deductibles on our health care. On August 29, 2024, our Labor Management Healthcare Consensus Committee (LMHCC) met for our last consensus decision making. Several members of our negotiations table team also serve on LMHCC (which includes all the 17 bargaining units in Hennepin County). Consensus regarding our health care plan design and premium amount was focused on:

- Deductibles either maintained at 300/600, or changed to 500/1000 to bring down the necessary 8.7% premium increase
- Whether to continue the consensus process into next contract
- The AFSCME TA to premium splits of 3/17/17/15 & No premium holidays for 3 years

When it came time to vote, consensus was tested on the status quo plan design (deductibles of \$300/\$600). Of the 22 votes cast (each local gets one vote), 21 voted to keep our premiums the same and one (Local 2822), voted against it. When asked the first time why they could not come to a consensus, Local 2822 stated that “Labor Relations would not bargain with them at the bargaining table.” This stemmed from Local 2822 removing themselves from the negotiation table. As is practice, Hennepin County bargains first with the AFSCME coalition, and then the County pattern bargains with all the other bargaining units (those other unions receive what AFSCME received).

Local 2822 wanted Labor Relations to bargain with them first. When they did not get their way, Local 2822 decided to vote against consensus on maintaining the 300/600 deductibles. Consensus was also tested with the higher deductible amount of \$500/\$1000. Of the 22 votes cast, 21 could live with this deductible amount, but once again, Local 2822 voted “no.” The county also tested consensus on whether all parties want to continue the consensus process in the next contract. This would continue to allow labor to discuss and vote on plan design recommendations to the county commissioners for implementation in the future. All voted yes, except for Local 2822, which means that Local 2822 voted to not be at the consensus table for our health insurance plan in the future.

This is very unfortunate because one vote of “no” could mean that the county will not bring us to the table to suggest plan design changes. We are in the process of working with Labor Relations by way of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to continue with the consensus process. Labor Relations brought the higher 500/1000 deductible amount to County Administrator David Hough, because it is what Labor Relations wanted as a proposal. If we had reached consensus on the \$300/\$600 deductibles, then Labor Relations would have had to present that plan to Hough as the result of the consensus process. The County Board approved the higher \$500/\$1000 deductibles, which is what all employees will have for the 2025 plan year.

The continued misinformation by Local 2822 has caused confusion for their members. We cannot regressively bargain. This means that we cannot rescind a TA and we cannot suggest more items that would go against the TA. Local 2822, now that they are bargaining separately from the five AFSCME local table team, can still suggest health care items, but not if they contradict the agreed-upon TA.

Local 2822 also has chosen to remove themselves from the Hennepin County AFSCME Policy Committee. The Policy Committee is where the six AFSCME locals join to discuss issues and propose labor actions to address concerns of all our members with Hennepin County. Even though Local 2822 is no longer in the bargaining coalition or part of the Policy Committee, please know that the five-local table team and the Policy Committee will continue to support Local 2822 members. It is unfortunate that the current leadership of Local 2822 has become very challenging to work with, and showed significantly different priorities while bargaining—hence the request from all the other locals to leave the coalition. We as a union are supposed to be in solidarity with one another, not bargain against the interests of our members and not use this as a personal platform instead of collective action.

The most recent communication sent out by Local 2822 purports that they won several healthcare items. Just to be clear, the same items were what the table team had a tentative agreement on with the employer. Communication that was previously sent out, stated that they did not agree and that Council 5 was working against them; however, they are now taking credit for what happened at the table. This confirms that in fact, they did agree to the agreement at the bargaining table on August 23, 2024. Misleading communication can be very challenging to members. We want to make sure that everyone is on the same page, and that we are collectively informed of what your union is discussing at the table.

The disparaging comments made about members of the table team by Local 2822 do not represent the best of who we are: AFSCME Siblings! We will continue to fight for a fair contract for all and we hope that you will stand with us! Please contact Latonya Reeves or Local 2822 Field Rep Kyle Smith if you have any questions. Thank you!

In Solidarity;

Latonya Reeves—President of AFSCME Local 552 and Hennepin County Policy Committee

Grace Baltich—AFSCME Local 34 President

Jonathan Polster—AFSCME Local 1719 President

Amanda Gustafson—AFSCME Local 2864 President

Adam Tomczik—AFSCME Local 2938 President