

ON THE

# MOVE



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**DEFENDING AGAINST COVID-19**

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE DEFIED  
THE  
NAYSAYERS  
AND  
SURPRISED  
THE PUNDITS

# Together we're meeting the challenge

*Coronavirus pandemic tests us all*

2019 was a very good year for AFSCME members, a year of righting the wrongs done by one-time governor Bruce Rauner. None of us could have imagined it would usher in a 2020 like this one, with a global pandemic and steep economic decline; by any measure a very bad time.

This new crisis has made me think back on the four long Rauner years of incessant battle. We turned back assaults on our rights and our standard of living by a governor who wanted to annihilate the labor movement in Illinois.

We'd had fights long before Rauner, with other governors, mayors, county boards, sheriffs and more. But none had sought to use the whole power of the state against us, rounding up all but one Republican in the Illinois General Assembly to join his assault on workers' rights, trying to strip the collective bargaining rights of every public employee, withholding contractually obligated step increases for state employees, seeking a way out of pension obligations, trying to cut benefits for injured workers and pushing to make Illinois cities and counties right-to-work zones.

We fought back in the courts, the streets, and ultimately at the ballot box. In the end, Bruce Rauner went down to defeat and we came back stronger than ever.

It's worth remembering the ferocity of that four-year fight as we face an even greater challenge today—a global pandemic that has upended our entire world.

Our economy is in tatters. Our federal government is in disarray. Our communities have been traumatized. Our health is at risk—and increasingly, so are our jobs. Our family and friends may be sick, even dying. In some instances, we are the ones who are sick, and, yes, even dying.

Yet here's what I know,

because I know the fight we've come through: When we're threatened, AFSCME doesn't run away. We stand up together and find ways to fight back. And now, in a moment of great peril, that is just what we're doing.

We're an army of public service workers, doing our jobs with grit and determination. We're maintaining public safety, assuring clean streets and safe water, repairing roads, helping those in need, protecting those at risk, caring for the sick, responding to emergencies and so much more.

Standing together as one strong union, we've been able to give voice to workers' concerns and insist that they be addressed. We've ensured that tens of thousands of AFSCME members are able to work remotely—and safely—from home. Developed rotating schedules that reduce workplace interactions. Compelled employers to provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and put appropriate safety protocols in place. Secured better leave benefits for employees stricken by the virus or caring for a loved one who is. Gotten access to testing so that employees in high-risk environments don't unknowingly spread the virus to their families or coworkers. Improved health care coverage and mental health services. Expanded access to emergency child care. And in some cases, we've secured pay premiums that recognize the extraordinary risks that many employees are facing daily on the job.

In other words, we've come a long way in a very short time. But this fight is far

from over. As Illinois begins to reopen, many AFSCME members will be called back to work, demands for public interaction will increase, social distancing will become more difficult to maintain and the virus could spread more aggressively. We will need to develop new safety measures that take into account such changing circumstances.

We need to keep up the fight on another front as well: protecting our jobs and the vital services we provide. The state of Illinois, its universities and local governments everywhere are hitting fiscal rock bottom. The massive loss of jobs in sectors such as air travel, hospitality, and retail is fast heading our way as tax revenues crater and expenditures needed to fight the pandemic continue to soar. Now layoffs in the public sector are starting as well.

State and local governments where so many AFSCME members work need a massive infusion of federal funds—now. Without it, they'll be driven to layoffs and cutbacks that will not only further damage the economy but hamper efforts to halt the virus and treat its victims. So we must act now to demand that Congress and the Trump Administration fund the front lines.

At the same time, all of us have to keep fighting on our own front lines to ensure that every possible precaution is taken to protect our lives and health and to safeguard the communities we serve. It's no easy task. But I'm thinking back to those four long years battling Bruce Rauner and his union-busting crusade. How we persevered through an unceasing torrent of assaults year after year, how we refused to be beaten down, how we defied the naysayers and surprised the pundits, how we rose up again and again.

And that's why I believe so strongly that however long it takes, we'll soldier on, we'll meet the challenge, and we'll rise again, AFSCME Strong. 

Council 31  
**AFSCME**  
We Make Illinois Happen

### On the MOVE

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Mike Newman, Deputy Director  
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Tom Greensfelder, Designer

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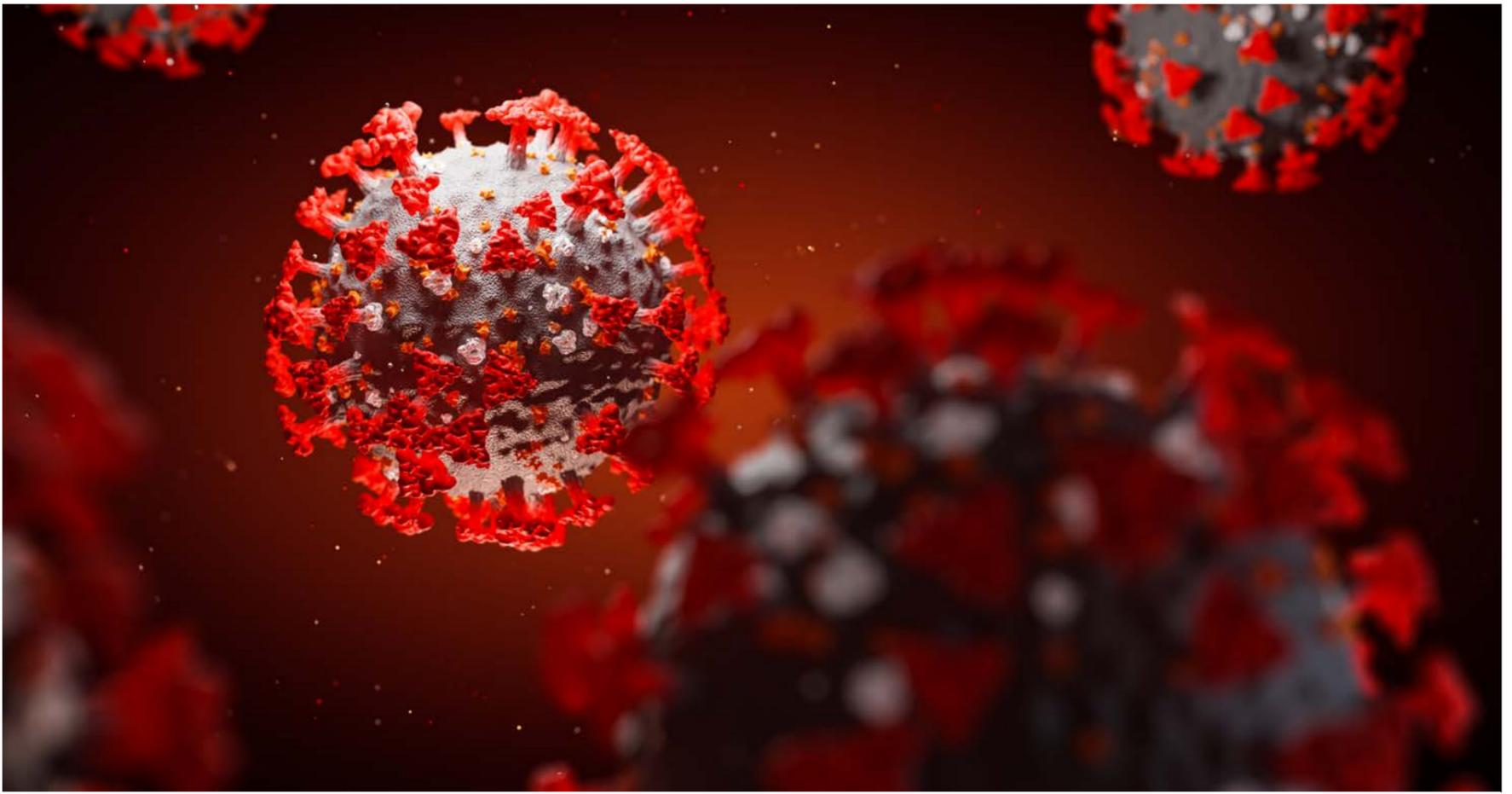
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# Union fights for worker safety as global pandemic reaches Illinois

**T**he first case of the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19 in the United States was reported Jan. 21, 2020. Three days later Illinois had its first confirmed case. From the start, AFSCME members were on the front lines—and AFSCME was there to advocate for them.

The Trump Administration was alarmingly slow to respond to the dire threat the virus posed—initially dismissing it as just another version of the flu and then dismissing the need for a coordinated national strategy. This grave responsibility then by default fell to each state to handle more or less on its own.

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker was among the first in the country to take action to try to halt the rapidly spreading virus, issuing a statewide stay-at-home order on March 20 and aggressively working to acquire urgently needed ventilators and test kits, and expanding hospital capacity.

Even before the governor's order, AFSCME members like Local 505 steward Shamika Smith were on the job defending against COVID-19. As an epidemiologist specializing in communicable disease for the city of Chicago Department of Public Health, Smith and her co-workers had their sights set on the threat since it first appeared in China late last year.

"We work with a company

that tracks international issues and uses AI predictive modeling software and flight data to give us the likelihood of anyone carrying the virus coming through O'Hare or Midway," Smith explained. "So as soon as reports came out of China, we started to do preparation at the time, and we kept our eye on it."

The role of communicable disease experts is critical during this pandemic, Smith said: "We're out here trying to figure out the source of illness and prevent spread by informing people as much as possible. We're here to keep your family safe."

## Putting safety first

To ensure that AFSCME members can do their jobs safely, the union worked to expand remote work so that more employees could work from home and demanded that safety protocols be put in place for employees who must report to the job site.

AFSCME also led the fight for fair treatment for employees

who become sick with COVID-19 so that they remain in paid status and do not need to use their own benefit time. Without such policies, sick employees can feel forced to show up to work, spreading infection.

"The minute COVID-19 was on the radar, AFSCME met with state, county, city and private employers to push these policies. We've been very successful in some places and met greater resistance in others," AFSCME Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits Martha Merrill said.

AFSCME Local 1028 negotiated a memorandum of understanding with Will County that ensures members remain in paid status if they are forced to take time off due to COVID-19.

"We requested labor-management meetings to make sure the work environment is as safe as possible and people are working remotely wherever possible," President David Delrose said, "and our MOU extends all the way through the end of the year, which is excellent."

Local 672 President Terry Boone said he's in constant contact with management at the Moline Valley school district.

"We were very fortunate, the first couple weeks they sent everyone home with full pay and benefits. Now we're working split shifts, social distancing, so you're not working next to anybody and we're still getting full pay and full benefits," he said.

All across the state,

AFSCME local unions were able to work out similar safeguards for their members with employers who were sincerely concerned about their workforce. Other employers didn't act so responsibly, Merrill said. "The compassion of each employer comes into play at a time like this. Not all employers have shown their humanity in this once-in-a-lifetime situation and instead they're treating this like business as usual."

## Standing together

While complying with the governor's order, AFSCME Council 31 staff and local union officers have remained on the job without pause, connecting with members and addressing concerns as the virus spurs near-daily issues and questions.

Local 505 steward Smith is grateful for the union's role in helping CDPH staff navigate the coronavirus crisis.

"As things were changing, the union stepped in and made sure everyone understood how they would be protected and get the support they need," Smith said. "That helped address the fear people had, because even people who deal with disease every day get scared: How's this going to affect me and my family?"

Boone said Local 672 members are very much concerned about safety as they clean and maintain the schools, but they also worry what the future holds.

"Our fear is that if this continues into the fall and school remains closed, that would be traumatic for our custodians," Boone said. "We could be facing cutbacks or layoffs."

**"The vital role of public service workers is more important than ever."**

That uncertain future looms for many public service workers who are putting their communities first during this crisis. And AFSCME is pushing the federal government to provide financial relief so their sacrifice isn't rewarded with pink slips.

"Illinois is facing a crisis like we've never seen before and in times of crisis, the role of public service workers becomes more important than ever," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "While tens of thousands of AFSCME members are on the front lines every day, fighting the coronavirus pandemic and supporting our communities, they know they can count on their union to fight for them." 

Members can call AFSCME's COVID-19 Information Line at 800-899-9728 for assistance or visit [AFSCME31.org/COVID19](https://www.afscme31.org/COVID19).

# Politics—not as usual

*Elections move forward in uncertain times*



Challenges of pandemic voting could require massive vote-by-mail program for November election.

Illinois' primary election occurred just days before Gov. JB Pritzker issued a statewide stay-at-home order in response to the growing threat of the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite the challenges, the state moved forward with its primary and AFSCME-backed candidates fared very well, with a majority winning in national, state, county and judicial races. Visit [AFSCME31.org](http://AFSCME31.org) for complete primary election results.

As the nation turns its

eyes to the November general election and the possibility of another COVID-19 surge this fall, states and the federal government are considering massive vote-by-mail programs.

In Illinois, the General Assembly would need to approve any changes, such as the state board of elections

sending applications to vote by mail or mail ballots themselves.

Other options include promoting vote-by-mail to voters while at the same time ensuring safer polling places with proper personal protective equipment and room for voters to keep an appropriate distance from other voters and poll workers.

Early voting for the November election is scheduled to begin Sept. 24 in Illinois. Voters can request mail ballots starting Aug. 5. AFSCME will begin its voter

education program this summer, by phone only if necessary. Sign up to join the effort at [AFSCME31.org/Volunteer](http://AFSCME31.org/Volunteer).

## AFSCME backs Biden

On March 23, AFSCME's International Executive Board voted unanimously to endorse Joe Biden for President.

"AFSCME members had many great candidates to choose from in the 2020 Democratic primary, and that's why we did not endorse early as we typically do," the board said in a statement after the vote. "The primary campaign has put AFSCME's priorities front and center, with all candidates embracing unions unapologetically, in a way unseen in national politics in many years."

The board expressed appreciation to the other candidates who made support for working families the centerpiece of the primary, but emphasized that the time had come to unite around Joe Biden.

"Biden is a man of integrity and character who will wake up every morning thinking about how to lift us up," AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. "From health care to education to retirement security, he has a gut-level understanding of the struggles facing working families. And I know he will fight for our collective bargaining rights and our freedom to stand together in a strong union."

By contrast, Trump's agenda has been about weakening unions, strengthening corporate influence, and further enriching the already wealthy. And his handling of the coronavirus crisis has proven he's not up to the task

of leading the nation safely through challenging and uncertain times.

## Victory north of the border

The good people of Wisconsin made some important history in their primary election on April 7—in the middle of shelter-in-place—by electing pro-labor justice Jill Karofsky to the state's Supreme Court.

The April 7 ballot featured the partisan presidential primary choices, but also binding non-partisan general election races for judicial and municipal government posts. Karofsky, a progressive circuit court judge, had the support of the state's Democratic Party, while Kelly was strongly backed by Republican and conservative anti-labor forces.

Literally putting their health and safety on the line (and long lines they were), tens of thousands of Badger State voters stood for hours, braving COVID-19 exposure and even hailstorms, to cast their votes in person for the state's primary election. The Supreme Court seat was the centerpiece contest, and Judge Karofsky's victory was an unanticipated upset.

She defeated incumbent Daniel Kelly, a staunch supporter of former governor Scott Walker and his eight-year assault on public employee rights.

No one was more surprised than Walker's allies in the Republican-dominated legislature, who had done everything in their power to manipulate the election and suppress voter turnout. The outcome may also bode well for November: Despite Trump's full endorsement and all the hurdles facing voters, Kelly still went down to convincing defeat.

## FAIR PAY CALL-IN DAYS

During a statewide coordinated call-your-legislator campaign in April and May, AFSCME members in community agencies that serve individuals with developmental disabilities and youth in need sent a clear message to the Illinois General Assembly: "Respect our work. Raise our pay!" Some 25 local unions participated in the Fair Pay Call-in Days, placing hundreds of calls to legislators in every part of the state.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought into greater focus the work these AFSCME members do under challenging circumstances every day to support and care for at-risk and vulnerable children, youth and adults. These frontline workers—some caring for people sick with COVID-19, putting themselves at risk of infection—are undervalued and underpaid. That's why AFSCME continues to make fair pay a top priority, leading the fight in Springfield for increased state funding to raise DSP and youth care worker wages.



# Virus crisis hits Illinois budget

*COVID-19 pandemic leaves very deep hole*

**A**s every Illinois resident, school and business struggles with the far-reaching fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state budget is no exception.

The deep economic downturn caused by the coronavirus crisis has slowed tax collections on the revenue side while accelerating costs on the spending side. The result is a budget hole so deep that multiple fiscal years will feel the pain, starting with an immediate shortfall in the current 2020 spending plan and complicating the passage of a blueprint for the 2021 budget year that starts this June 1.

"It will be bad," AFSCME Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said. A glimpse of just how bad was laid out by the Governor's Office of Management and Budget in mid-April when its revised forecast projected a \$2.7 billion loss to general revenue funds in this year's budget and a further \$4.6 billion loss in the coming fiscal year.

Despite the challenges, Gov. JB Pritzker assured the state that a budget will pass, assuaging fears that Illinois would suffer from another harmful stalemate like the one caused by Bruce Rauner.

"Illinoisans are all too familiar with the pain the lack of a state budget can cause. So, let me just say upfront, we will not go without a state budget,"

Pritzker said. "We will need to make extraordinarily difficult decisions on top of the difficult decisions that we've already made. But together with the state legislature, we will make them."

## Layoff threat looms

Given such a wide gap, layoffs, program cuts and closures are among the inevitable threats. And it's not just state employees who could be affected. Because state government provides important funding for local governments, school districts, universities and not-for-profit agencies, cuts at the state level cause harm everywhere.

Likewise, the powerful corporate interests who will use any excuse to push pension cuts and the front groups that backed Rauner's attacks on AFSCME members are surely sharpening their axes now.

"This is going to be a very, very difficult financial challenge for the state," Pritzker said. "We have big holes in our budgets as a result of what's happened with Covid-19. It's nobody's fault. It just is what

it is and we're going to have to deal with it."

Economic analysts predict a national recession and the Chicago Sun-Times reported a potential "\$8 billion in lost tax revenue spread out over multiple years for the state's budget."

"There is one piece of good news for Illinois," Webb-Gauvin said. "Unlike during the Rauner years, the Illinois General Assembly and Gov. Pritzker are working together to meet this unprecedented challenge."

## Federal help needed

House Majority Leader Greg Harris told reporters that lawmakers "are still trying to wrap their heads around the enormity of what could happen unless the federal government steps in to help."

Although state government will receive \$2.7 billion from stimulus legislation already passed in Washington—the CARES Act—those funds can only be used to pay new costs incurred in fighting the novel coronavirus, such as paying for tests or personal protective equipment, expanding hospital capacity and more.

AFSCME is urging Congress and the President to quickly approve hundreds of billions in additional funds for states and local governments nationwide that can be allocated as needed. 



## FAIR TAX NEEDED MORE THAN EVER

The coronavirus pandemic underscores the need to pass the fair tax constitutional amendment this fall.

A fair tax system is needed "now more than ever," Gov. Pritzker said, pointing out that the state's massive budget hole will be \$1.2 billion smaller if voters pass the fair tax in November.

If the fair tax passes, anyone making less than a quarter-million dollars a year would get a tax cut (or pay no more than they do now) while only the wealthiest top 3% would pay a little more, raising more than \$3 billion a year.

Unsurprisingly, the Illinois Policy Institute—the voice of our state's wealthy elite—opposes the fair tax, saying the amendment vote should be put aside in light of the pandemic.

"Of course, this isn't just about one year. It's about fixing the structural deficit that exists for the state," Pritzker said. "We're in a pandemic, we're in an emergency, this crisis is causing a significant disruption to our fiscal year coming up. But we have many years ahead, and I think a fairer tax system makes sense to me."

Chicago Tribune columnist Eric Zorn poked fun at IPI's claim that struggling small businesses would suffer under a fair tax system.

"These 'small businesses' for which opponents are wringing their hands aren't moms and pops scraping by at the counters of their storefront," Zorn wrote, but rather "successful entrepreneurs taking home more than \$250,000 a year in taxable income in profits. ... Anyone who nets more than 250 large a year in the post-corona economy isn't going to be crushed by an additional income tax on every dollar more than that amount."

The Chicago Sun-Times editorial board argued that since revenue is needed to fix the budget, the wealthy should be the ones who pay a little more: "If we're serious about all that love for those 'essential' workers, there's only one clear choice: Vote for the graduated income tax on Nov. 3."



# Staying safe while helping others

*Union secures protection for employees providing critical services*

**E**mployees in the Illinois Department of Human Services continued to report to work every day at public offices and residential facilities throughout the state, even as many other organizations closed their doors amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The role of IDHS employees—aiding those most in need—is especially critical during this public health emergency, especially with ever-growing numbers applying for vital assistance to sustain their families. So AFSCME local union leaders pressed for needed changes to ensure that employees could continue working without putting their own health at risk.

“Once the pandemic started hitting in full force, we already knew we’d be deemed essential employees,” said Terrance Roberts, vice president of AFSCME Local 2806 and a human services caseworker. “It’s our duty to assess and meet the needs of the public. For us it was just a question of how employees were going to stay safe during this time.”

## Union calls for action

Public assistance is delivered by AFSCME members at more

than 70 Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs) in Illinois. Despite the warnings of the CDC, it soon became clear that far too many of the FCRCs did not have appropriate protocols in place to safeguard against the dangers posed by the coronavirus, especially given the rapid pace at which the virus is transmitted.

Tragically, two employees at an FCRC died as a result of contracting COVID-19 and several others tested positive for the disease.

AFSCME Council 31 called on DHS to act swiftly to issue statewide virus prevention standards and argued strongly for closing the FCRC offices to the public, while strengthening efforts to respond to the department’s customers via phone and computer so more employees could work from home.

The department responded affirmatively to the union’s call. All but 14 public offices were closed on March 30 and



AFSCME Local 2806 Vice President Terrance Roberts, human services caseworker.

stronger virus protection measures were put in place in those that remained open. Then on April 16 DHS closed every remaining office.

Since the pandemic hit Illinois in full force, DHS reported, “online and telephone applications for food and medical benefits are skyrocketing, with nearly 30,000 people seeking first-time medical or food benefits each week compared to the usual 10,000 weekly applications.”

“That was the major thing we were advocating for: better assisting those who are in dire need,” Roberts said. “Being essential is a blessing, we’re providing services to those who are in need.”

## Tragedy hits

DHS developmental and mental health residential facilities have been hard hit by the coronavirus. The state’s two largest developmental

centers—Ludeman DC staffed by Local 2645 and Shapiro DC staffed by Local 29—suffered the most with hundreds of residents and staff infected with COVID-19 and several people dying of the disease.

“At the very outset we had major concerns about the facility’s plan to address COVID-19, including PPE, basic cleaning, timely disclosure of known cases, proper social distancing and consistent temperature checks,” said Local 2645 President Crosby Smith. “Management didn’t address our concerns quickly enough and we lost three beloved members.”

Management is now more open to dialogue, Smith said, but “there is still work to do by the administration to better support the very dedicated employees who come every day because we care deeply for those we serve.”

It took a full-court press from Council 31 and local union leaders to ensure that staff had the necessary PPE and to halt movement of staff from one unit to another at these centers.

“Tragedy has touched every one of us, yet AFSCME members are standing strong, determined to do everything possible to protect their health and rights,” Lynch said. “We can serve our communities and safeguard ourselves if we continue to stay united during this unprecedented time.”

## A RADIANT SMILE—A SAD LOSS



AFSCME Local 2806 member Michael Head died of COVID-19 on March 27. He was a public aid eligibility assistant for the state of Illinois. His wife, Renee Head, is a member of the same local union and a human services caseworker.

The two had been friends for many years before they got married five years ago. Renee said her husband Michael had a “radiant smile” and was “a practical joker who liked to laugh.” She said her husband really cared about people. That’s why he left his 22-year career at AT&T and began working for the state last year.

Renee said Michael found his new job in public service more rewarding, making sure people got the benefits they needed. “He loved the job,” Renee said. “He liked helping people, talking to them, and they liked talking to him.”

Michael was working the front desk at the IDHS Woodlawn Family Community Resource Center when he came home ill. It started as a fever and some coughing, but a few days later, Michael was having trouble breathing as the coughing got worse. He was rushed to the hospital.

Within a week of coming home sick, he passed away at the hospital.

“When he went to the hospital, they wouldn’t let me in there with him,” Renee said. “He was alone and that really bothered me. And after, we couldn’t have family over. That was really hard.”

The family held a funeral with the ten people allowed. Renee said she plans on having a memorial for Michael later “so everyone can have the opportunity to be together and celebrate him.”

## DEFENDING AGAINST COVID-19

# AFSCME Members on the Front Lines



## David Pedersen

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, LOCAL 1563

I'm the Volunteer Services Coordinator at Manteno Veterans Home. We have 230 residents, most of whom served in conflict or during a time of war. Our oldest resident is 103. Her name is Josephine and she served during World War II.

From the moment I walked into this job, I felt like I should have always been here. This is where I want to be, serving these guys. You go home feeling you made a difference.

Usually, my job is to oversee 90 volunteers, coordinate activities—from music to bingo to outings, work with community outreach organizations and coordinate all donations. But now, during the pandemic, all volunteers are prohibited from coming. There is only one entrance, for staff only, and there is a checklist for COVID-19 symptoms you must pass and we take temperatures three times a day. When we go home each night, we're quarantined like everyone else.

The Pritzker Administration did a great job of isolating our guys. Percentage wise these are the guys at risk, many need constant oxygen, we could lose them easily. But the guys are in good hands. We've been very safe and everyone has taken this very seriously. We haven't had any cases.

The activity aides here have been doing a phenomenal job. We've had to come up with creative ideas to keep our guys in touch with their loved ones. We went out and got iPhones and have been doing Facetime and Google duo with family members every day. That's our number one priority: trying to connect our residents with the outside world.

We set up a dedicated streaming network so we can do virtual tours and exercises and activities that stream to residents' room on a channel. I also brought my guitar in and we've been doing some singalongs since we can't have musicians come in.

The residents have a great sense of humor, they're real tough. They band together and take care of each other. It's really neat to see that they have that bond.

The staff is bound together too, by AFSCME. And that helps. We have a common goal, which is to keep these guys safe. We're all in this together.

## Marlon Thomas

ASPIRE, LOCAL 486

I work in day services at Aspire, which is mostly a classroom setting. But since the coronavirus came, we're all in the group homes doing DSP work, making sure clients are safe.

The residents have developmental, mental and physical disabilities, and our population is mostly elderly, so they are very vulnerable. Every day we have to explain to them why we have to keep our distance from each other. And every day they ask, why can't we go out, why can't we go to the grocery store, to church? The isolation has been very difficult for them and that's the most stressful part of it. I feel so bad for them because they're stuck.

We come up with little things to do. Since it's been a little warm, we'll go on the back deck, play cards, go for a walk. The staff is dedicated to making sure the clients are safe and trying to keep some type of normalcy in their lives.



It's been very stressful for our union members too. I get calls asking if there will be layoffs, and what Aspire is doing to protect the staff as well as the clients. They are tough and willing to do whatever they can to help their clients, but I can hear the wear and tear on their voices because of the lack of communication from upper management. We're on the frontlines doing what we're asked to do, but a lot of us feel that we're left to ourselves. We do this work from our hearts, but we're underpaid.

With the union, by being all together, we're strong. Members speak up for themselves and when there's an issue, management listens. With this situation, the union plays a major role. If there wasn't a union there would be total chaos, they would push us aside. I think a lot of people would have walked away.

I'm very worried about myself, the staff and

the clients. Daily prayer is the only way I can make sense of all of this. I just pray that things will get better and that we get through this with nobody coming down with the virus.



## Vickie Myers

APERION CARE CENTER, LOCAL 2386

I'm the Activity Director at Aperiaon, which is a nursing home with a lot of psychiatric patients. I've been there almost 21 years. Most of our residents are pretty mobile and there are a few people in wheelchairs. Normally, I lead residents in activities and games. Some days we go on outings, we do shopping trips, library outings. In the summer time we go fishing. Go for walks.

A lot of our residents don't have family so it's kind of like we are their family. A lot of them want to give you a hug. It feels like home, like a little community.

I'm afraid they would be on the streets or worse without the care we give. If they weren't here, they wouldn't take their medicines and [their condition] just gets worse.

Now with the coronavirus, we're staying six feet apart, we're all wearing masks. Every morning before we walk in the door, we take temperatures. We feed them in their rooms. They can't have visitors, so families come to their windows and talk, or they call and skype. Once we had a church group come and hold up signs and sing.

Most of them are doing pretty well. The residents are mostly in their rooms so we do one-to-one activities or small activities with two roommates. If it's nice enough out we can take them for walks, a few people at a time, six feet apart.

I'm just doing what I can to keep them happy. I go shopping so they can get what they need since they can't go out. They've been coloring, art projects like stained glass collages and crosswords. Yesterday we went out and made bird feeders to put between windows so they can watch the birds and squirrels come eat. We're trying to make a difference. 🐦

# AFSCME Members: Ser

## Vonnie Moore

CITY OF EVANSTON DEPARTMENT OF STREETS AND SANITATION, LOCAL 1891

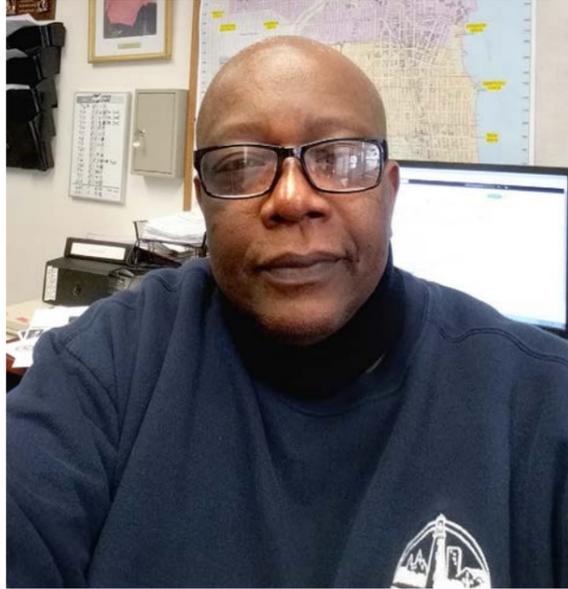
We know we are essential, and we need to be out there. We're like the post office: Regardless of the weather, we go.

Sometimes sanitation seems to be at the bottom of the totem pole. But we know that we have a tool that will help us if something goes sideways real fast or real hard. That's our union and it's a good feeling. If we didn't have a union, a lot of us would be out of work or [management] would do some things that we wouldn't like. Having a union in place helps us get things done.

When this virus started, management didn't come to us to ask what we need, they made the decision for us. So, we had a conversation with management and our union executive board. Everyone had an opportunity to express themselves. A lot of things you can do by the book, but it takes those of us in the field to get it done right.

Now we're taking precautionary measures to stay safe. Normally there are two guys in a vehicle and now we have one person per vehicle, and we follow each other.

The public has been wonderful. They come



another and get along well, that gets us through the day. We have a good laugh and keep on going. We look after each other. We all try to do our job with enthusiasm, with respect and with dignity.

## David Bustamante

JACKSON COUNTY AMBULANCE SERVICE, LOCAL 2464

We started taking precautions when the coronavirus first came up. Once the lockdown came into effect, our system protocols changed.

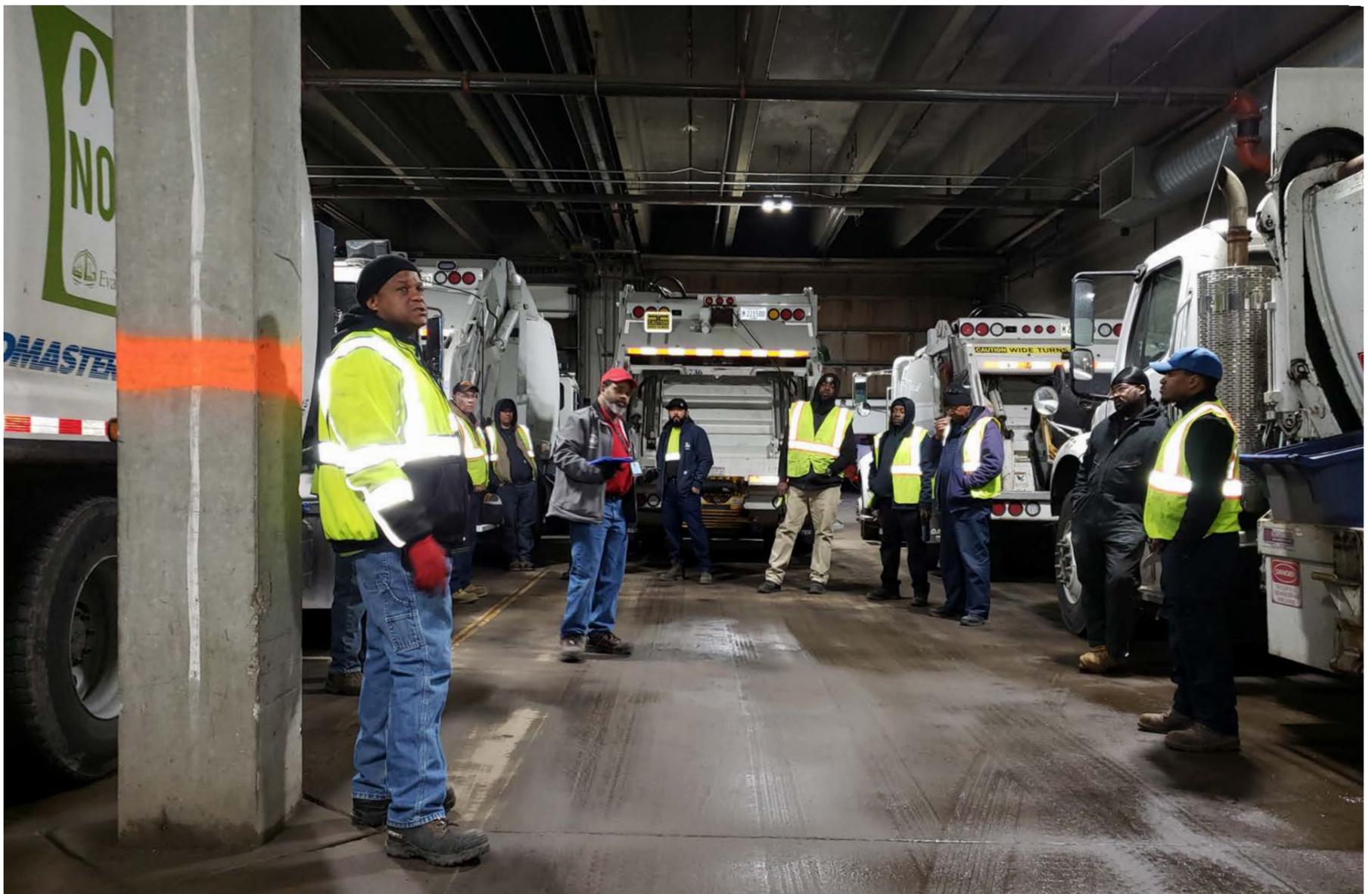
Every call, we go in with a surgical mask and gloves, but if we feel there is a sign or symptom of COVID or someone has been exposed, we use full PPE: mask, goggles, surgical gown, the whole nine yards.

We are using a "one in and one out" approach to patient contact. The hospital has a COVID unit set up aside from the emergency room, so that person who has direct contact with the patient helps hospital staff bring them in so the other person in the ambulance stays as far away as possible. And the direct contact person then stays in the back until we get back to the office.

At the office we do a complete clean, spray the truck down, the walls, cot, equipment and cab, and we also use a UV light on top of that to

out and talk to us. Today a resident came out and gave one of our guys a mask the same color as his fluorescent jacket. People have given us face masks, refreshments, and a lot of smiles and compliments. They say thank you for doing your job, thank you for being here, thank you for working and stay safe. That helps.

As I was told 18 years ago when I got this job, it takes a special kind of person to do sanitation work. We have 10 route drivers—the best group I've ever worked with—and we're dedicated to what we do. The fact that we like one



AFSCME Local 1891 members at the city of Evanston's department of Streets and Sanitation prepare for work.

# Supporting Our Communities



AFSCME Local 2464 members Stephen Roberts, Kris Whitlock, David Bustamante and CJ Diamond in Jackson County.

check and double check to make sure everything is good and all of our employees are safe.

You walk into situations and you're definitely more aware of your surroundings. Everyone is being even more cautious than we normally are. This has been an eye-opener for people. I think we'll probably continue to do a majority of these precautions even after this is all over.

The county has stepped up. We've had two people out who were quarantined because they had possibly come into contact. They are getting paid time off and not using vacation time. The van drivers who transport people in wheelchairs to and from the hospital when an ambulance isn't needed are at home on paid time off without using benefit time.

We're small and close-knit so we take care of our own year-round. We're checking up on each other all the time. We're doing everything we can for patients and staying safe.

## Alishia Glover

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES, LOCAL 2081

We're on telework status and I'm on temporary assignment as a supervisor. The investigators in the field are still going to homes and hospitals to assess safety for children. They check in every morning and every afternoon via phone.

We ask screening questions like whether the client or someone in the home has been infected, tested positive or been on quarantine. We don't want any of the employees to put themselves at risk of exposure more than they are already.

Initially, we didn't have any PPE [personal protective equipment] at all. The union has maintained contact with management regarding safety issues as they are arising. AFSCME expressed concerns that staff receive protective equipment

to stay safe. We finally got masks and gloves issued.

This is nothing anyone could be ready for, but we always work together, and this is no different. It's always a collaborative effort to help each other out. Staff are continuing to rely on each other for support, advice, encouragement, direction and making sure information is shared. Supervisors are doing what they can to be supportive of those in the field, so they maintain their own safety while trying to assess the safety of children.

Everyone is really trying hard; our staff is doing the best they can and trying to maintain the role and responsibility of the department as it relates to child protection, and also protect our-



selves and our families at home.

I've been with the department for 26 years in June. We come into this work for a reason. It isn't always easy. But maintaining safety of children is important and when you have positive outcomes on your cases and positive influences with the families that helps to keep you focused and motivated.

## Charles Luna

COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE, LOCAL 2226

Things have changed a lot for us. We're definitely on the front lines of what's considered the pandemic epicenter of the nation: Cook County Jail. We've had hundreds of cases of the virus among staff and inmates.

Being assigned to the records office at the jail, I'm making sure we're processing people for release expeditiously, setting up video court and fielding emails from attorneys.

We're making sure we're doing everything possible to maintain sanitation. We've opened buildings that were previously closed to put inmates in single cells and keep social distancing in the living quarters. Unfortunately, inmates congregate together during required recreation time in day rooms and the telephones are within two feet of each other. We try to make sure rules are followed and we tried to tape off quadrants in the day room to keep distance.

We have several living units that are designated as quarantined housing because they



are trying to separate people with symptoms of COVID-19 and do our part to keep the virus from spreading.

In Local 2226, 10% of our members have been out because of the virus. We've had two that were hospitalized and one on a ventilator and now he's in recovery. I've made sure to reach out personally to each person to see how they're doing and make sure they know we're here for them if they need anything and that we're always going to be there. No one has passed away and I keep praying that no one does.

Many of us are being mandated to work extra hours. We took an oath to protect the citizens of Cook County and the state of Illinois and while we're battling this invisible attacker, we want to make sure that we're doing our part. And we also want to make sure we're not bringing this home to our families. 🦋

# AFSCME Members on the Front Lines



## Retesha Thadison

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY, LOCAL 2971

It's been very stressful, because this pandemic hit all of us. Honestly, it's a struggle. I've been with IDES for 17 years and this is unprecedented, the volume of claims we're getting. And it affects your work and home life because you're trying to juggle so much.

I'm so tired from the work day and I'm trying to make sure my daughter is doing her schoolwork and I can't assist her because I have to come to the office. I'm a rollercoaster of emotions. Some days I'm really positive and there are other days when I'm really just worn out.

We want to do everything we can for the claimants—and we're trying—but there are tens of thousands of claims and you're going, going, going all day and doing so much and at the end of the day you feel exhausted and you feel like you didn't accomplish anything because the numbers don't go anywhere. You could do 100 claims and at the end of day you still have the same

number you started with. It's overwhelming. The need is so great, I just try and work through it as best I can.

At the same time, we know it's a difficult time for the claimants and the business owners. The claimants have abruptly lost their jobs and they're trying to figure out how to make ends meet and feed their families, but the lines are constantly busy and they can't get through, or the system crashes and they can't get their claim filed online. They can't get to an office and they don't realize what's happening on our end.

I have a lot of amazing co-workers. Some have expressed that they're taking it personally how we're being portrayed negatively in the media. The public has no idea how hard we're working. We're putting in hours of overtime, working Saturdays and coming in early for our shifts. Working overtime is hard, my daughter is FaceTiming me, asking me, "When are you coming home?"

Our office is in Champaign. I'm an adjudicator, so I conduct interviews with the claimants and employers, do the fact finding and issue determinations for eligibility.

AFSCME has been involved a lot, trying the best they can to get the agency to allow as many of us as possible to work from home instead of coming into the offices. Initially, when the pandemic first started and offices were closed to the public, we had an issue where we didn't have the hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes we needed. The union was instrumental in getting us the PPE and necessary supplies to keep us safe and our workspace disinfected. That's been a big help.

I'm tired. I'm feeling worn out. But at the end of the day I'm very dedicated to my job. I know what I'm doing is important to the community and I know what I do makes a difference. That helps keep me going and allows me to set a good example for my kids. I'm showing them that even when you're tired, you have to put your best foot

forward and do the work for the benefit of everyone; have empathy for other people and do what you can do help them in their time of need.



## Stacy Mickelson

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, LOCAL 401

Stacy Mickelson is a support service worker at Murray Developmental Center in Centralia, a residential facility for individuals with behavioral and medical needs. A member of AFSCME Local 401 for nearly 20 years, Michaelson provides laundry services for hundreds of center residents and staff.

Mickelson also has a special talent: She runs her own sewing shop called Stitching N More. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, the shortage of personal protective equipment like face masks became quickly apparent and Mickelson knew she could help.

"One Saturday morning I woke up and posted on my site that I would do masks for medical staff for a donation," she said. She's already made 600 in her shop for local health care providers, the hospital, a group home and for AFSCME members at Centralia Correctional Center.

For her own co-workers at Murray Center, Mickelson went to work, recruiting a few co-workers to help on the project. Together, they have made 550 masks so that every employee has one. Now they are already working on a second round to ensure direct care personnel have more than one.

"It's a scary time," Mickelson said. "If you have to work 16 hours, you need a mask and you want a back-up."

After work, she heads to her shop to keep sewing.

"I've had people give me material, elastic, money donations; I don't have a price," Mickelson said. She shows no signs of slowing. "I have orders for hundreds more." 

## SKYROCKETING UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS

- The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) processed more than 755,000 initial unemployment claims from March 1 through April 18.
- This is 12 times the number of claims IDES processed over the same period last year.
- IDES paid out more than \$700 million in benefits from March 1 through April 16. In the first two weeks of April alone, the department paid more than \$500 million in unemployment benefits to claimants.

Sep. 19

Dec. 19

Mar. 20

# Correctional centers face unique challenges

*Stopping spread of coronavirus in state prisons*

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, AFSCME members in the Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice have been on the public safety front lines—working to ensure that Illinois prisons and youth centers remain safe and secure.

It's an enormously challenging mission that requires contending with a highly contagious and fatal virus in extremely close quarters.

AFSCME leaders have been working intensively to ensure that strong virus prevention measures are in place, that needed personal protective equipment is available, that leave benefits are expanded and that proper procedures are followed when staff or offenders test positive for the virus.

## Tackling safety issues

From seeking to bar visitors to state correctional facilities to successfully ending intake from county jails, AFSCME was instrumental in making DOC and DJJ facilities as safe as possible.

But there have continued to be a plethora of problems to tackle: policies for quarantine and other lockdown procedures; temperature checks for incoming staff; limited vendor access; reducing the number of offenders moved at once; increased deep cleaning; enhanced communication between union and management.

The union has been able to address these and other issues as they arise because of an unprecedented level of involvement by local leaders at the facility level. AFSCME Council 31 secured an agreement with DOC and DJJ whereby each local union can designate a safety officer at their facility to be part of the crisis response team.

"Unfortunately, even these very aggressive measures have not been sufficient to halt the spread of the disease in DOC facilities," AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Eddie Caumiant said. "As of now, dozens of staff and offenders at DOC facilities across the state have tested positive for the virus, with the greatest concentration at Stateville Correctional Center."

## Union intervention

Under pressure to get offenders released to reduce the spread of the virus, DOC pushed staff to review offender files to determine if they met criteria for early release.

However, the process was scattershot at best and the criteria for consideration of early



**When the coronavirus hit Illinois, Menard Correctional Center was poised to help. Participants in the prison's industries program are producing thousands of masks and gowns for virus protection during the crisis. "We had the manpower, the will and all the machines to do everything needed to make personal protective equipment," AFSCME Local 1175 President Dennis Young said. He's pictured in the sewing shop, second from left, along with ICI lead worker and AFSCME member Michael Schnicker, far left, members of the sewing crew, and Warden Anthony Wills, far right.**

release anything but clear.

Steve Shipley, a corrections casework supervisor at Jacksonville Correctional Center, said staff found out about the early release plan along with everyone else—on the news.

"We had no forewarning," Shipley said. "We started getting multiple lists, four or five different lists from different people, to review for EDSC, earned discretionary sentence

credits, and ED, electronic detention." Nobody could answer questions or explain what criteria to use for which list. "I was getting extremely frustrated. It was like pulling teeth," Shipley said. "We felt abandoned."

Finally, Shipley reached out to AFSCME for help. AFSCME Council 31 Labor Relations Specialist Chuck Stout brought the issues Shipley and others

had raised to DOC's COVID Incident Command and helped correct many of the problems.

"I had exhausted literally every avenue I had as case-work supervisor, but when I reached out through my union, it immediately started getting better," Shipley said. "If I hadn't had the avenue of the union we would still be drowning without any answers and no help."



## SURVIVING COVID-19—WITH PAY



Josh Howard and Erin Hamilton-Howard with their children.

Both Josh Howard and Erin Hamilton-Howard work at Logan Correctional Center and are members of AFSCME Local 2073. Josh is a behavioral health technician and Erin is a medical records clerk. The couple were

two of the four staff at Logan that tested positive for COVID-19 early in the pandemic.

"I was getting bad headaches, a little congestion, tired, I thought it was from the stress of everything," Josh said. But soon it became clear what it was when Erin became so ill she couldn't work.

With four children and being fairly new to their jobs, Josh and Erin had used up most of their paid time off. They worried how their family would make ends meet.

"Thankfully, within a week, our local union had a memo of understanding for paid COVID-related time off, up to 80 hours," he said. "That was a huge relief. I thought, now I only have to be stressed about being sick. I don't have to

worry about whether or not we're going to get paid for the next two weeks."

A former special education teacher, Josh said his new career at Logan working with offenders with mental health issues is a natural progression. A lot of the women he helps in his psychoeducational groups used to be special education students and he understands the traumas and challenges they face.

"The union's response to all this craziness solidified for me that I made the right career move," Josh said. "There was a significant problem between us and management, and AFSCME solved the problem for us all within a matter of a few days. That was amazing for me." 

# ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



## Helping feed families

NOW THAT BARGAINING IS over, these same AFSCME members are staying united during the COVID-19 crisis to help their school community—and beyond.

While schools are closed and unemployment claims are skyrocketing, many students and families are hurting and in need of food assistance. These school employees are volunteering to prepare meals and deliver them to central locations for distribution to anyone who asks for a meal.

“We have a lot of volunteers, preparing, bagging, getting the meals to the different sites to make sure we’re ready for the public and handing them out,” Barnett said. “All three locals help. The demand is extreme in the community, we know because we run out of food every time.”

“I’m thankful that members are more than willing to step up,” she said. “We took volunteers because we didn’t want to put it on members who had elderly parents or children at home who really needed to be home. Within in an hour, I had dozens of volunteers asking what we needed them to do.”

“We’re stepping up everywhere saying we’re here for our members and our community,” Holloway said. “That’s what unions are there for: We’re here to help people when they need it.”

AFSCME Local 692, 1275 and 3210 members—paraprofessionals, bus drivers and nutrition services employees—are still on the job while Rockford public schools are closed, serving meals to the community.

## Rockford Public Schools locals win contracts, help community in crisis

MEMBERS OF THREE AFSCME local unions at Rockford Public Schools won fair contracts this spring, guaranteeing wage increases and protecting critical community services from privatization. They also stepped up as a team to ensure area families had food security during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

AFSCME Local 692 represents paraprofessionals who assist students and teachers at the Rockford school district. AFSCME Local 1275 represents school bus drivers. And AFSCME Local 3210 represents nutrition services employees.

## Making gains at the table

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT WAS demanding cuts and concessions during negotiations, but the 750 AFSCME members pushed back on the district’s proposals for a short contract, limited wage increases and reduced health care options.

In the end, all three locals won five-year agreements with wage increases in every year of the agreement, enough to manage a modest increase in

employee health insurance contributions and build a better life for their families.

“Our committee dug in, did the research, and put long evenings into crafting proposals,” said a statement issued by the Local 692 bargaining committee. “We informed RPS district 205 how important paraprofessionals are to the lives of the students, and our need for a fair contract to recruit and retain quality employees. We won.”

Local 1275 President Catina Barnett said her proudest accomplishment was getting a five-year agreement.

“That’s what unions are there for: We’re here to help people.”

“That’s a big deal because every contract the conversation of outsourcing our employment is always on the table,” Barnett said. “That’s always their big threat—we can take your jobs; we can outsource you. We stood our ground and said, stop threatening our jobs, give us job security.”

Sharon Holloway, president

of Local 3210, said she was also excited by the five-year deal and the annual raises that come with it.

“It’s exciting and it was a long time coming,” she said of the raises, but she also said the local isn’t stopping their push for higher wages. “We still have battles to win with the school district.”



Above: New AFSCME members at CGH Medical Center are caring for COVID-19 patients in the Sterling community. They organized their union late last year to win a voice on the job for themselves and to improve care for their patients.

Right: AFSCME Local 2912 members at Chicago Animal Care and Control are on the job during the pandemic—taking care of hurt and homeless animals.





AFSCME Local 3653 members plunged into Lake Decatur on March 6 to raise funds for the Special Olympics.



AFSCME Local 3236 member Trish Gudeman with ISU's Reggie Redbird.

## ISU clerical staff win contract

AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS at the bargaining table with Illinois State University, members of AFSCME Local 3236 reached a four-year agreement with the university.

Providing clerical support to departments and the administration, these members make ISU work. Yet they had to fight hard to win this contract, which includes annual raises and finally starts rewarding

longtime employees for their experience and dedication.

Bargaining team member and office support specialist Trish Gudeman said it was challenging to rally the local after years of being brushed aside by the administration. But rally they did—and they had the entire campus on their side.

“We rallied support from students, faculty and other staff,” Gudeman said. “They became outraged and came out with us, sending emails, rallying, causing a scene. Our

members felt stronger when they saw the support from so many others at the university behind them.”

Negotiations dragged on and Gudeman and her fellow bargaining team members suspected the university was using it as a tactic: “They were trying to wear us down—but we eventually wore them down.”

This was Gudeman’s first union contract negotiation experience and she was surprised by how difficult it was to get the university to listen to the employees’ concerns and ideas. But she also realized how much support she and her co-workers have among faculty and staff.

AFSCME Local 1110, which represents building service, grounds keepers and food service, had their fellow AFSCME members’ backs. And the new graduate student union and non-tenure track faculty union joined in too. Out of the fight has sprung a new solidarity group on campus, which started meeting regularly before the pandemic hit and will continue to be champions for each other.

“I’ve never been involved in anything like this before,” Gudeman said. “It was exciting to see the grassroots efforts making a difference.”

The bargaining committee was led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler and President Marsha Perry, along with Juli Laird, Amanda Dingler, Pete Steadman, Bethany Martin and Gudeman. 

## Raising awareness, building unity

THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROVIDES year-round sports training and competitions for more than five million athletes, both children and adults, with intellectual disabilities. AFSCME members in the Illinois Department of Corrections and other law enforcement agencies have long been part of building awareness and raising funds for the organization.

AFSCME Local 3653 member Cassie Withrow is a former correctional officer and current office coordinator at Taylorville Correctional Center. She’s been involved in fundraising for Special Olympics for the last few years. She said last year DOC employees raised over \$260,000, a phenomenal accomplishment.

“We are pretty giving people,” Withrow said. “Not just our local, but the entire Department of Corrections. There are so many different facilities and we raise money across the institutions. We do everything as an agency together—plus we can be really competitive with each other which is fun.

“There are not a lot of good things that come out of the news about DOC and this reminds people that we are people too. We care,” she said. “Those are the things we want people to remember.”

Like everything else, fundraising for Special Olympics has been hurt by the coronavirus pandemic and everything is on hold. The Summer Games in June are cancelled. Many of the lead-up events like polar plunges were cancelled too, but some were held earlier in the year.

Withrow joined in the statewide “super plunge” in Evanston on February 20, when participants plunged into a frigid Lake Michigan every hour for 24 hours—“it was brutal,” Withrow recalled. “They were breaking up the ice so we could get in the lake.” Local 3653 held their own plunge on March 6 in Lake Decatur.

For now, Withrow’s fundraising efforts are on hold.

“It’s so stressful for everybody,” Withrow said of the pandemic. “We don’t know how to keep our families safe. My husband is a cop and we’re in the thick of it every day and don’t have a choice, we have to go to work.”

Withrow is grateful to her charity work for helping her meet fellow AFSCME members at different institutions.

“A strong sense of unity and community is so important in our line of work,” Withrow said. “There are so many good people. We all want to work and come home to our families safely. That’s what everyone wants, no matter what agency you work for. AFSCME helps us do that every day.” 

# AFSCME INTERVIEWS

## Cedric Alexander

*Cedric Alexander Psy. D. is a law enforcement expert with over 40 years of experience in public service. He is the author of *In Defense of Public Service: How 22 Million Government Workers Will Save Our Republic*.*

### What is the role of public service in our society, why is it important?

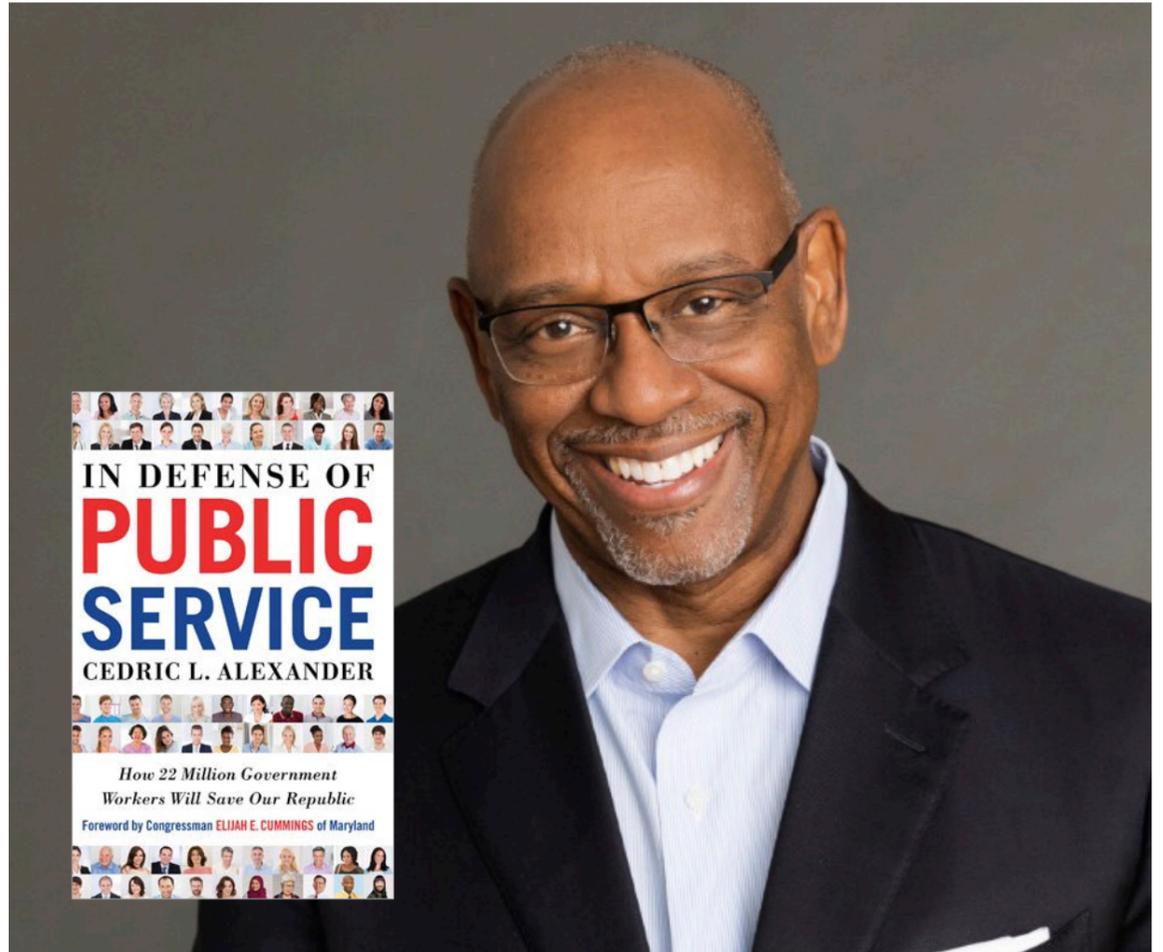
Public service plays a huge role in maintaining our democracy and our republic every day. One thing about elected officials, they change every few years, but our public servants are there during every administration. Our career public employees take it on the chin for us every day, they keep us safe and they keep our country a democracy.

It's important to recognize our public servants because so often they go unrecognized, are taken for granted, not paid what they're worth. But in critical times we need them the most. If we go back to a couple years ago to the government shutdown, in spite of the fact that those employees didn't receive paychecks for weeks on end, they came to work every day.

And in this moment, COVID-19 has shut down our country—but our public employees are keeping the lights on for us, keeping our community safe and providing the necessary services we need to get past this pandemic.

### What role do unions play in public safety and quality public services?

I've never been a member of a union because policing in the south is not a union environment. But when we rely on employees to carry out missions that need to be done every day, those employees need a sense of safety, they



need a fair, equitable, and competitive salary, and great benefits for themselves and their families. Unions are very important to the strength of this nation and to the employees they serve.

### How can public service workers prevent burnout, especially in this trying time?

That's a huge challenge for everyone, particularly in the public service community. Regardless if you're an EMT, a corrections officer, a local government employee, there's a limited number of personnel budgeted for those communities.

None of us could have prepared for what we're experiencing today. We're asking people to work longer hours and be exposed to an invisible enemy none of us can see. In spite of the dangers involved, public servants still abide by their oath and do the very best that they can. We're figuring this out as we go, and our public servants know they can't stop. They must get out there on the frontlines to fight this enemy every day and that's what they're doing. We cannot take care of those afflicted by this disease if we don't take care of our public servants who are providing the support that's needed.

### How will government workers save our republic?

My new book, *In Defense of Public Service: How 22 Million Government Workers Will Save Our Republic*, is written with local, state, federal, tribal and military employees in mind. The book is dedicated to them, to remind the American public of the great work they do and have done. To have a democracy in which we live in freedom doesn't come at a cheap price. The 22 million people who provide service to the other 300 million people are critical to our infrastructure, our democracy and our republic.

I encourage everyone to get a copy—read about yourself, read about your history. It's written for you by someone like you who worked in government all their career, from the ground to the highest level of government. 

Follow Cedric on Twitter @calex\_law and learn more at [clalexandergroup.com](http://clalexandergroup.com).

United States®  
**Census**  
**2020**

**2020 CENSUS:**  
**BE COUNTED!**

The US Census is underway. The outcome is critically important for AFSCME members and the communities we serve. Here's what you need to know:

- ✓ There's still time to be counted in the 2020 Census. Due to the coronavirus, the deadline for households to participate has been pushed back.
- ✓ It's easy! You can participate online, by phone or by mail.
- ✓ Participating in the Census is our civic duty: It's a way to participate in our democracy and say, "I COUNT!"
- ✓ Billions of dollars are at stake. If our neighbors don't get counted, our workplaces don't get the necessary funding to provide critical services like schools, roads, public works and other vital programs.
- ✓ Visit [2020census.gov](http://2020census.gov) to get started.

# RETIREE NOTES



## Staying strong, apart *A special message from Chapter 31 President Larry Brown*

THE CORONAVIRUS PAN-  
demic has brought new chal-  
lenges and concerns to all of  
us. I want you to know that  
AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees is  
still at work every day—even as  
we’re complying with Governor  
Pritzker’s stay-at-home order—  
to advocate for you and provide  
you with vital information and  
resources.

Thanks to our efforts  
through the Alliance for Retired  
Americans, the Treasury  
Department reversed course  
and announced that Social  
Security beneficiaries who typ-  
ically do not file a tax return  
will automatically get a stimu-  
lus payment. That means that  
all Americans, regardless of  
age, should receive a one-time  
payment of \$1200, as long as  
they do not exceed the \$75,000  
income limit.

Medicare has also changed  
its coverage and payments  
related to Covid-19. Medicare  
already covers its enrollees for  
much of what they might need  
if they contract the virus and  
become seriously ill—and it  
has expanded some services  
and loosened some rules in  
response to the crisis.

Medicare, Social Security  
and the Centers for Disease  
Control (CDC) are all concerned  
about the explosion in scams  
targeting senior citizens. All  
three agencies are urging retir-  
ees to beware of email and  
phone scams claiming they  
have special information about

the virus. In some cases, scam-  
mers might promise to send  
you a coronavirus test, masks  
or other items in exchange for  
personal information like your  
Social Security, Medicare, bank  
account, drivers’ license or  
credit card numbers.

Under no circumstances  
should you provide this infor-  
mation to such unknown call-  
ers. Testing is available through  
local and state governments,  
but tests are not delivered to  
your home. Rely on verified  
websites like the CDC.gov or  
AFSCME31.org/COVID19.

Fear and anxiety about the  
COVID-19 pandemic can be  
overwhelming and cause strong  
emotions. Make sure to support  
yourself and your loved ones:

- Follow all CDC recommen-  
dations for self-protection  
against the coronavirus—  
especially staying at home,  
washing your hands, avoid-  
ing close contact with people  
who are sick, disinfecting  
frequently touched surfaces,  
and calling your health care  
provider if you are sick.
- Take breaks from watching,  
reading or listening to news  
stories and social media.
- Take care of your body. Take  
deep breaths, stretch, or  
meditate. Try to eat healthy,  
well-balanced meals, exercise  
regularly and get plenty of  
sleep.
- Make time to unwind. Try to  
do some other activities you  
enjoy.

- Connect with others. Talk  
with people you trust about  
your concerns and how you  
are feeling over the phone or  
by video connection.

While AFSCME Illinois  
Retirees has cancelled all meet-  
ings until the restrictions on  
meetings are lifted, we will  
continue to provide you with  
important information and  
monitor issues related to your  
benefits. Stay safe.

## Retirees demand legislature rein in Rx costs

ON MARCH 3, NEARLY 200  
retirees took part in a lobby day  
at the state capitol in support  
of Chapter 31’s efforts to rein in  
the costs of Prescription Drugs.

“We could be heard  
throughout the building as  
we chanted outside the House  
chamber,” said Leon Otto, a  
member from the Centralia  
area sub-chapter who attended.  
Retirees were outside the  
House chamber where they  
hoped legislators would be  
able to hear them and support  
House Bill 3493.

HB 3493 would establish a  
five-member Prescription Drug  
Affordability Board that would  
have authority to conduct  
cost reviews and set “upper  
payment limits” for any brand  
name drug with a wholesale  
price of \$30,000 or more for  
a one-year supply or course  
of treatment, or for any drug  
for which the wholesale price  
jumps by \$3,000 or more in a  
single year.

“That kind of upper-pay-  
ment limit is important for  
people like me,” said Sharon  
Lockett, a retiree from the



Bonnie Hester (Sub-chapter 78) recognized for her service by Treasurer Frerichs.

Chicago area sub-chapter. “I  
need ten different medications  
for my Lupus/Graves disease  
and my kidney issues. There  
have been months that I’ve  
had to skip a dose or cut my  
medications because I couldn’t  
afford the cost. We need to  
pass meaningful legislation to  
reduce the cost of life-saving  
prescriptions.”

Upper payment limits  
are commonly used in private  
insurance and state Medicaid  
programs, but they are typically  
negotiated individually between  
the health plan and drug manu-  
facturers and vary dramatically.  
The board would also have  
authority to regulate generic  
drug prices if those drugs cost  
\$100 or more for a 30-day sup-  
ply or if their prices jump 200  
percent or more in a single year.

While HB 3493 did not  
pass out of the Prescription  
Drug Committee, there may  
be similar legislation in the  
Senate.

## Peoria area retiree honored

BONNIE HESTER, A LONG-  
time Chapter 31 member and  
sub-chapter 78 officer, recently  
received an honorary Black  
History Month Award from Illinois  
Treasurer Michael Frerichs.

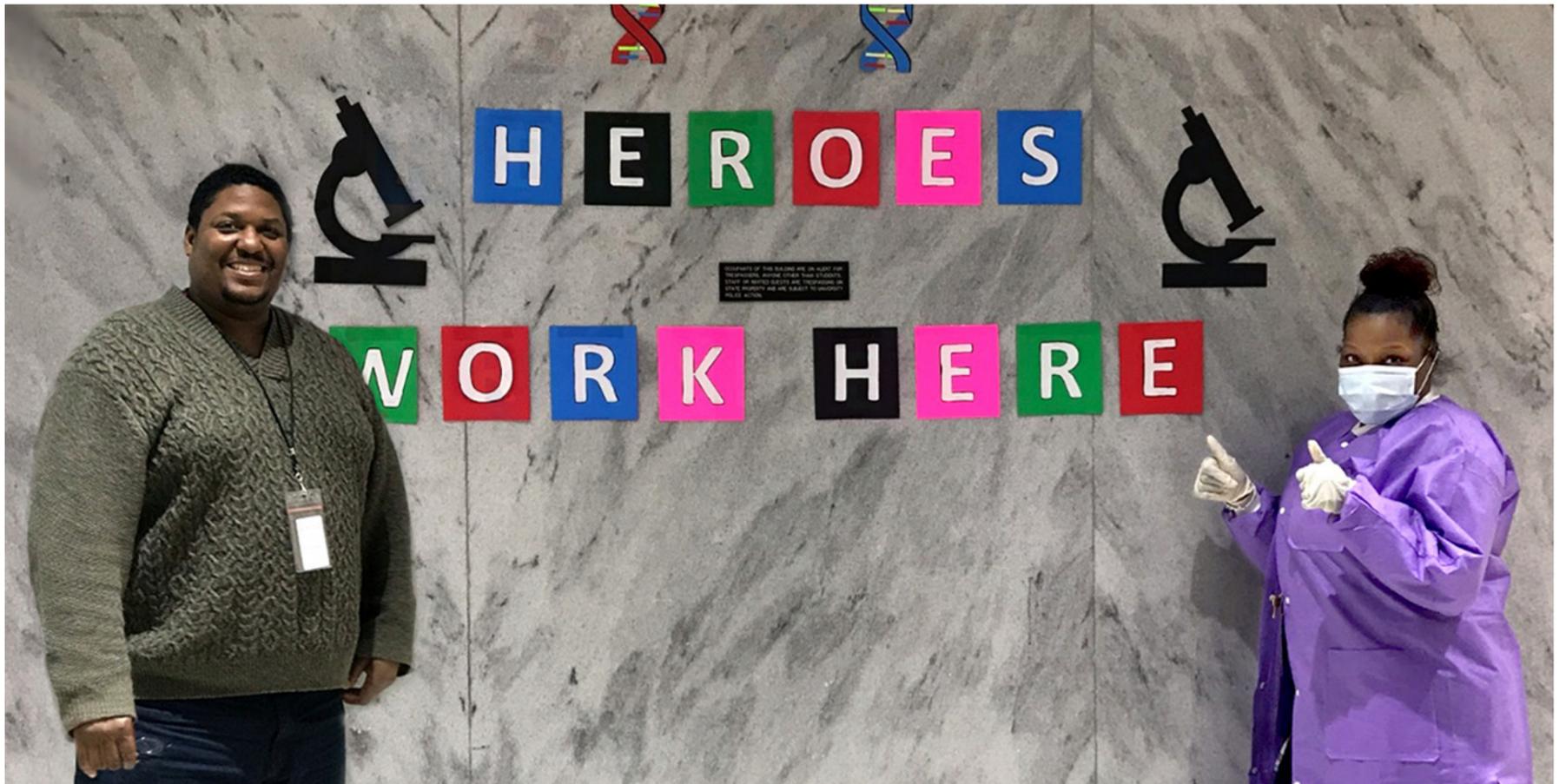
“It’s wonderful to see someone  
who has been such a dedicated  
public servant receive recog-  
nition,” said Carol Hadsell,  
president of the Peoria-area  
sub-chapter.

Hester, a former Peoria  
City/County Health Depart-  
ment employee and Peoria  
County Board Member, has  
been a member of AFSCME  
Illinois Retiree Chapter 31 for  
over 15 years and has served as  
an executive board member in  
her sub-chapter for seven. She  
was honored for her positive  
impact and service in the com-  
munity. 



AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees at the state Capitol on March 3, lobbying to reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

## DEFENDING AGAINST COVID-19



## Their Job: Stopping the Spread of the Virus

The Illinois Department of Public Health, local health departments and public health partners throughout Illinois are working together with federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency. AFSCME members at IDPH in Chicago, Springfield and Carbondale are on the front lines in the battle against the virus, helping save as many lives as possible. As *On the Move* went to print, the total number of coronavirus cases in Illinois had reached 36,934 with 1,688 deaths associated with the virus.

### Joel Price

SUPERVISOR, MOLECULAR AND VIROLOGY LABORATORY (CHICAGO), IDPH, LOCAL 2258

Every AFSCME member here is working at least part of their work day, in addition to their other responsibilities, helping with the workflow for the COVID testing. We've been asked to work extended shifts as we're anticipating several thousand [tests] a day. Across all the laboratories it could be 5,000 to 10,000 specimens a day.

We're on our second-generation assay, meaning the testing format, which gives us more throughput, meaning we can do many more specimens in a shift. We work closely with our suppliers to secure all the necessary testing reagents [substances used to detect and measure the virus] to keep the assays up and running. Plasticware is in short supply, so we have a lot of challenges procuring those.

It's challenging. We're used to handling infectious specimens all the time, but these are highly complex assays and you need well-trained staff, so we're training additional people to handle the increased volume. Also, workspaces that are appropriate to handle the specimens can only handle a certain number; viral testing is handled in a biological safety cabinet that allows us to protect ourselves from the specimen and keeps the specimens from being contaminated

from other specimens when you're handling multiple specimens at the same time.

Compared to the last administration, it's night and day as far as what [the Pritzker Administration] is doing for state employees. I'm a happier state employee in spite of the challenges we're trying to meet. They're trying to do their best for the people of the state of Illinois by increasing the capacity and our staff has risen to the challenge. IDPH employees and people from the crime lab of the Illinois State Police are doing a great job supporting one another.

This is our job and it's very rewarding. We're here to protect the people of the state of Illinois and that's what we do best.

### Ahmad Abuarqoub

SUPERVISOR, MOLECULAR MYCOBACTERIOLOGY LABORATORY (CHICAGO), IDPH, LOCAL 2258

I come and work on the weekend, also some nights I stay late. Not just me, but other staff. It's impacting us but we're so happy to help. This is our job, to jump in and help save Illinois citizens. We cannot say no. It's about public health. This is our duty.

As a union steward, people come to me concerned when they hear somebody may be positive. They come with concern about their families, their health and their safety.

I'm really proud of all the AFSCME members here. When they heard about this going

on, they wanted to jump in and help and be part of the team. They work on their lunch time, their break time. Some work seven, eight hours without taking a break. They come and check on their colleagues, ask if they can help. Before they go home, they ask if they should stay.

They work as one team, showing their unity and power. They are really doing a great job.

### Jennifer Noel

MICROBIOLOGIST, ENVIRONMENTAL MICROBIOLOGY LAB (SPRINGFIELD), IDPH, LOCAL 805

I've been working at the Department of Public Health since 2007 in the environmental microbiology lab. *Listeria*, salmonella and *E.coli* are the primary tests we do. The clinical lab does influenza including H1N1, measles, mumps, malaria and other tests. We've had big outbreaks in the past, but nothing like this. It's so contagious and hitting so many people. I've never seen anything like it.

To prepare the labs for an influx of COVID-19 tests, the state brought some other staff on temporary assignment and expanded our hours. We've never been required to work so many shifts or so much overtime. Right now, we've got two shifts overlapping and we're working on the weekends. Working extended hours keeps the equipment running longer so we can get tests completed quicker.

And we've had help. AFSCME Local 1964 members from the four Illinois State Police labs in Springfield are assisting our efforts. They could be working from home, but they are going above and beyond.

We all want to step up and do what we have to do. 

More information, including regularly updated statistics, can be found at [dph.illinois.gov/covid19](http://dph.illinois.gov/covid19).