

An Important Message for AFSCME Members in State Government

— March 16, 2019 —

Our nation is facing unprecedented challenges as the coronavirus continues to spread across the country. Public employees face particular challenges at this critical moment because the work we do is so essential to the well-being of our communities. [Click here to review the basic fact sheet](#) our union has developed and previously sent to you with background on the virus and the critical steps that each of us urgently need to take every day.

From the earliest days of this outbreak, Council 31 staff and local union leaders have been meeting with CMS, state agency leadership and management at the worksites to advance workplace policies that can further safeguard employee health and prevent the spread of the disease. Most agencies have already taken steps to put important protections in place and many have included recommendations that AFSCME has made. Those recommendations are numerous and vary considerably by worksite and/or type of work. If you have concerns that have not yet been addressed at your workplace, be sure to let your local union leaders know about them.

AFSCME has also worked with CMS to develop state-wide policies that seek to protect employees' economic security as we cope with the unprecedented nature of this pandemic. [Click here to read a summary of some of these changes.](#)

Yesterday, Governor Pritzker took further action to try to limit the spread of COVID-19 by directing state agencies to implement plans for a temporary reduction in state operations. The Administration has informed our union that each agency is in the process of identifying: 1) those employees who are vital to the core operations of state government and whose jobs must be performed at their current work locations; 2) those employees who can work remotely from home; 3) those employees who cannot work remotely, but will be on call at home. It is anticipated that agencies will begin notifying employees of these changes over the next few days and they will be effective as soon as feasible for the individuals involved.

Here is the press statement that the Governor's Office issued yesterday regarding this new policy:

“Gov. Pritzker also announced that he has directed state agencies to implement plans for a temporary reduction of government functions and workforce while maintaining core functions and essential operations.

Select employees will continue to report to work; while the remaining workforce will either work remotely or be asked to remain home on call while receiving pay. All state employees will continue to be paid during this period.

Over the next several days, the Pritzker administration will finalize these plans and update state employees and the public. The Office of the Governor will remain fully operational throughout this period.”

AFSCME welcomes this development and issued the following press statement in response to the Governor’s directive:

“State employees provide public services that are vitally important to the well-being of every Illinois resident. They protect kids, safeguard public health, help struggling families, keep prisons safe, care for veterans and people with disabilities and much more.

“Governor Pritzker is right to direct state employees wherever possible to work remotely during this outbreak. Preventing community transmission of the coronavirus is necessary to keep people healthy and prevent a surge of infections that overwhelms the health care system. The governor is modeling the behavior that every Illinois employer should follow.

“Our union’s top priority will remain protecting the safety of those state employees who continue to work on the front lines of public service in the days to come, in prisons, veterans homes, disability centers, critical human services and more. It’s vitally important that they have adequate personal protective equipment, sanitary working conditions and the other support and tools they need to do their jobs and stay healthy.

“We will do everything possible to ensure that core services are maintained while all possible measures are taken to halt the spread of this virus and protect the health of employees and those they serve.”

Clearly, this is a positive development that will ease the concerns of thousands of employees. However, there are still many unanswered questions about how this new policy will be implemented. AFSCME has not yet been informed of which employees are in each of

the above categories, in particular which employees will be required to “continue to report to work.”

Our goal over the coming days will be to seek to ensure that all employees who can possibly perform their jobs from home are allowed to do so. And just as importantly, we will continue to work to ensure that every possible safeguard is in place to protect the health of those employees who remain on the job at state worksites.

As we all know very well, the coronavirus outbreak daily brings new concerns, issues and questions. You can be assured that AFSCME is doing everything possible to address these developments as they arise. However, at core, nothing is more important than the actions each of us can and must take every day: Do not come to work if you are sick. Make sure to wash your hands thoroughly and regularly. If you have the symptoms of COVID-19, consult a medical professional immediately. And, if you are in a high risk category (over sixty years of age and/or having an underlying condition) take special precautions. [You can get further information on the AFSCME website.](#)

There is no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic is the biggest threat that our state has faced in our times. There is also no doubt that state employees will rise to meet this challenge.

In unity,

Roberta Lynch
Executive Director
