

# State Employee Update



September-October 2019

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## What a Difference a Year Makes!

After four long years of former governor Bruce Rauner's unrelenting assaults on our rights on the job, our retirement security, our health care benefits, our family income, and our very right to have a union, we have a new governor and state employees are at last regaining lost ground and facing a brighter future. From the time of his inauguration in January, Governor JB Pritzker has been working to right Bruce Rauner's many wrongs.

In April the governor restored all AFSCME members to their appropriate step, complying with a Labor Board order that our union won invalidating Bruce Rauner's step freeze.

In May, after four long years of Rauner's stalling and stalemate at the bargaining table, we were able to wrap up negotiations for a new AFSCME contract with the Pritzker Administration. In June, state employees voted by an overwhelming 99% to ratify that contract. And on August 21, the AFSCME Bargaining Committee came together one last time for a formal contract signing with Governor Pritzker.

As AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said that evening, we may not always agree with this governor on every matter, but we know that he is striving to do the right thing, and that he respects unions and the collective bargaining process. In his remarks to the assembled representatives from both labor and management, Governor Pritzker emphasized how much he values the vital work that state employees perform.

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## “Made Whole”!

The Illinois Labor Relations Board also ordered that AFSCME members be made whole for the step increases they did not receive. That means receiving a lump sum payment for the wages they would have received had they been placed on the appropriate step(s) at the appropriate time. And this month Governor Pritzker is honoring that commitment as well. Most state employees have now been paid the back wages owed for their missed step increases!

Across Illinois AFSCME members are happily welcoming these payments which will enable them to catch up on many of the personal debts and responsibilities they've had trouble managing during the Rauner years. If your agency has not yet issued the steps back wages payments, check with your Payroll Department to find out when payments will be made.

There's still one last “step” in the step increases battle we've won. We anticipate in October employees will receive the interest owed on those back wages—interest payments also ordered by the Labor Board in compliance with state law.

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## Another Rauner Attack Reversed

The Pritzker Administration has now withdrawn the hundreds of petitions Bruce Rauner filed at the Illinois Labor Relations Board in the final months of his administration in a last-ditch attempt to strip nearly 1,000 state employees of their collective bargaining rights. (A few cases were already on appeal in circuit court and will be resolved separately.)

Most of the affected employees are union members who were alarmed and angry that they were threatened with loss of AFSCME representation. Council 31 attorneys were fighting each of these petitions at the Labor Board, but the process was grindingly slow, leaving employees in limbo. Now that the Pritzker Administration has agreed to withdraw those petitions, the positions involved will remain in AFSCME bargaining units with the right to AFSCME representation!

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## Health Insurance Changes Delayed

Some more good news! The Pritzker Administration has been working constructively with the union to resolve the large backlog of outstanding grievances that accumulated during the Rauner years. As part of that process, the Administration agreed to defer scheduled employee health insurance premium increases for six months. So there will be **no health insurance premium increases on January 1, 2020** as delineated in the new union contract. Instead the increases set for 1/1/20 will take effect at the same time as the increases scheduled for July 1, 2020.

## Reducing Overtime Mandation

The new AFSCME contract makes extensive revisions to the procedures for overtime mandation in DOC, DJJ, DHS, and DVA. Currently, employees in these agencies all too often are required to work exhausting, sometimes dangerous, amounts of overtime. Assignments are made on short notice and without regard for employees' personal commitments.

More than five years ago AFSCME won contract protections that gave employees the right to refuse mandation in certain circumstances. But during the Rauner years, management made it ever more difficult to do so. In fact, at many facilities mandation became management's coverage method, with no real effort made to develop alternative strategies.

The terms of the new contract require that management at the 24-hour facilities make (and be able to document) every possible effort to provide needed coverage before turning to mandation. The new language will also strengthen employees' right to refuse mandation if the appropriate procedures are not followed. The new provisions don't go into effect until the union and management in each agency (or each facility) have met to develop an agreed-upon plan.

## Trouble Ahead?

Deputy Governor Dan Hynes has warned all state agencies that next year's budget may require significant cuts. Noting that "Illinois continues to face significant financial challenges," the memo from Hynes and Budget Director Alexis Sturm directs agencies to develop a scenario in which their current year's funding would be reduced by 6.5%, finding the savings through "operational efficiencies".

**This budgetary red flag is a strong reminder of why it's so critical that we win the fight for a constitutional amendment that will allow for a Fair Tax so that the wealthy pay their fair share in Illinois.** Without approval of the Fair Tax ballot measure in November 2020, Illinois will continue to be in dire fiscal straits with the threat of massive budget cuts looming. Big Business is already gearing up to spend millions to defeat the amendment. We can never match their dollars, but we can more than match their energy and commitment. Every state employee will have a big stake in making sure that Illinois has the revenues needed to continue to provide the services on which our communities rely.

## Upward Mobility (UMP) Restarts

Bruce Rauner did his best to decimate the Upward Mobility Program, effectively cutting off funding needed for classwork and reducing the in-house staff needed to counsel employees and administer the program. But funding for UMP was included in the CMS budget and agreed to in the new contract, so the program is getting back on track.

After such a long hiatus, there is great pent-up demand for access to this program. Program procedures need to be updated and new staff added. There are currently more than 4,000 employees enrolled in the program—with more than 1,500 awaiting counseling. Employees are scheduled for counseling in the order in which their registration was received. Questions? Contact AFSCME UMP Coordinator Chris Goodman at 217-788-2800.

## Mark Janus' Money Grab

Mark Janus, Bruce Rauner's front man in the legal case that outlawed union fair share fees quit his job at DHFS to go on the payroll of the Illinois Policy Institute crowd—demonstrating his true loyalties. Last week a federal appellate court panel heard arguments in Janus' latest legal caper—a lawsuit against AFSCME Council 31 seeking to get back all of the fair share fees he paid BEFORE such fees were ruled unconstitutional.

A lower court has already concurred with AFSCME's argument that our union acted in good faith during those years based on a unanimous United States Supreme Court ruling. But rationality and basic fairness is alien to Mark Janus and his IPI allies. Their real goal is not just lining their own pockets, but taking down public employee unions.

**The best way to fight back against the IPI and the wealthy elite that's pouring millions into trying to destroy public sector unions is to work to build an ever stronger union here in Illinois. If you're not currently an AFSCME member, sign up today. If you're already a member, make sure you've signed an AFSCME Strong card to send a strong message to the IPI that you'll "never quit" your union!**