



STATE OF ILLINOIS | AFSCME MEMBER BULLETIN | FEB-MAR 2020

Health Insurance Updates

Last fall AFSCME Council 31 reached an agreement with the Pritzker Administration to delay the implementation of employee health insurance premium increases included in the new union contract for six months. So there were **no premium increases on January 1, 2020**. Instead the increases set per the contract for 1/1/20 will take effect at the same time as the increases scheduled for July 1, 2020.

The new AFSCME contract helped revive the Joint Labor-Management Committee on Healthcare that went dormant during the Rauner years. The committee is comprised of an equal number of union and management representatives and began meeting after the contract was ratified last summer. It has been working steadily since then seeking ways to reduce health care costs for both the state and employees.

The committee recently finalized plans for a number of health care initiatives, including a new telemedicine pilot program and a preferred prescription drug network that will allow participants access to doctors, specialists and prescription drugs at lower co-payment amounts. AFSCME representatives helped shape a new “high deductible” health plan that will be an option for state employees during the next open enrollment period.

Our union has also been engaged with the state to assure accurate assignment of the new employee premium contributions effective July 1, which are to be based on the relative cost of the health plans offered.

In sum there will be numerous changes to the state group insurance program for the 2020-2021 plan year. It will be important for union members to review the Benefit Choice materials, attend a benefit seminar, and make an informed decision regarding their health care coverage during the upcoming open enrollment in May.

Fair Tax Is Essential

We have a rare opportunity to take a big step toward resolving Illinois’ chronic fiscal woes in November. The ballot will allow us to vote to amend the Illinois constitution to finally ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share.

The Fair Tax plan before voters would raise nearly \$4 billion to address the state’s urgent financial problems, including paying down pension debt, better funding for schools, and averting cutbacks and layoffs in state government. And it will do by raising taxes only on the wealthiest 3%—while the rest of us will see our taxes stay the same or even go down. 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 has a big stake in making sure that Illinois has the revenues needed to provide the services on which our communities rely.

Maternity/Paternity Leave

The new AFSCME contract includes a significant expansion of paid parental leave—ten weeks’ leave upon the birth or adoption of a child! Unlike in the past, the full leave is available for each parent if both work for the state. Be sure to check out the most recent issue of AFSCME’s On the Move, which includes compelling first-hand accounts from some of the first parents to access this new benefit.

Reducing Overtime Mandation

The battle to restrict overtime mandation in 24-hour facilities in DOC, DJJ, DHS and DVA has been front and center for AFSCME members for years now. Employees have all too often been required to work exhausting, sometimes dangerous, amounts of overtime, on short notice and without regard for personal commitments.

More than ten years ago AFSCME secured agreements 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 operational coverage method, with no real effort made to develop alternative strategies.

The new AFSCME contract aims to change all that. It requires that management at the 24-hour facilities make (and document) every possible effort to provide needed coverage before turning to mandation. The new language also strengthens employees' right to refuse mandation if the appropriate procedures are not followed.

The new provisions regarding mandatory overtime do not go into effect until the union and management in each agency (or each facility) have met to develop an agreed-upon plan for implementation. Such plans are now operational in most DOC, DJJ, DHS and DVA facilities.

Upward Mobility (UMP) Restarts

The State of Illinois Upward Mobility Program was established more than three decades ago pursuant to provisions in the AFSCME Master Agreement, providing greater opportunities for employee education and advancement by establishing fair and accessible means of tuition reimbursement and career development.

UMP has been a great success with tens of thousands of state employees securing promotions into a wide variety of targeted titles. But that progress came to an abrupt halt when Bruce Rauner became governor. He cut off funding for classwork and reduced UMP staff needed to counsel potential participants.

When JB Pritzker became governor, the program quickly began to get back on track. Funding for UMP was agreed to in the new AFSCME contract and included in the 2020 CMS budget. As of Jan. 31, UMP counselors completed all scheduled initial counseling sessions for members who had enrolled during the last open registration.

And now UMP enrollment is open once again. In just the first week, over 1,100 union members have registered for the program. Detailed instructions on the steps required to enroll are on the UMP website under the "Eligibility and Enrollment" heading. A link will guide you to an online UMP enrollment application. Find other information on the UMP website or contact Chris Goodman, AFSCME Upward Mobility Coordinator, at (217) 788-2800 ext. 3348 or at cgoodman@afscme31.org.

Keep On Moving Up

Because we have a strong and expansive union contract, an extensive network of worksite stewards, a formidable record of winning in the courts, and tens of thousands of members who are prepared to take action together when our rights are under attack, our union has been able to successfully repel assaults from the likes of Bruce Rauner, the Republican legislators who backed him up, and the Illinois Policy Institute (which has now changed its name to Illinois Policy in an attempt to escape its checkered past).

The "new" Illinois Policy is leading the charge against the Fair Tax, while continuing to belittle public employees, seeking to drive down our wages, reduce our benefits and eliminate our pensions. And they haven't let up on their efforts to get public employees to aid and abet our own economic downfall by dropping out of our unions.

The best way to fight back against Illinois Policy and the wealthy elite that is 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 that you'll Never Quit your union—and then ask all your co-workers to sign too!