

Stepping UP

American Federation
of State, County and
Municipal Employees,
AFL-CIO

Issue 1
Winter 2019-2020



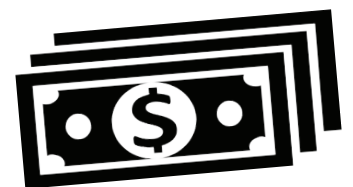
AFSCME FIGHTS BACK: A YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2018, AFSCME fought to survive Janus. In 2019, we thrived.

INSIDE:

AFSCME HOLIDAY GIVING
2019 ELECTORAL VICTORIES
ST. STEPHENS ORGANIZES FOR SERVICE
DNR EMPLOYEES STEP UP FOR THEIR UNION BROTHER

PLUS: What you need to know
about
your
union
pension



ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Being appointed AFSCME Council 5 Executive Director by the Executive Board is an honor. I am humbled by this opportunity to represent this membership-driven AFSCME Council. My top priority is the same as the first day I became a part of AFSCME, it is our members. Our members are AFSCME Council 5 and AFSCME Council 5 is our members.

Moving forward, our members are leading by active participation with respect and dignity in all work and for all workers. We will organize with strength to protect and preserve workers' rights. We will defend our common good. We will encourage each other and share knowledge in building a better tomorrow in all we do. When challenges appear, we will step up, if we need help, we will ask and if we know others need help, we will help with encouragement and integrity.

It is with great enthusiasm and commitment that I share with you, the regional meetings are happening across the State. Members are developing and leading the meetings. They are sharing their thoughts, ideas, learning from each other, building relationships and setting the direction of our union. Members are defining the geographical and statewide needs of their local unions and learning how to make a difference in building capacity of our union with emphasis on member awareness and involvement. They are planning trainings and including all members in such ways as: developing communications, legislative, political understanding and engagement plans, diversity & inclusion, negotiations, grievances, arbitrations and other member activities.

I am looking forward to continuing to work together with each and every one of our members, together we can achieve - and yes we will.

Executive Director

Julie Bleyhl

AFSCME Council 5 is a union of 43,000 workers who advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all working families.

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Stepping UP

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HOLIDAY GIVING

AFSCME members step up and give back this holiday season.

A **AFSCME members across the state embraced the holiday season by giving back to their union family and community.**

AFSCME Local 638 organized the Unions United Food Drive at Minnesota State University, Mankato, to benefit the ECHO Food Shelf. The drive ran from late November to mid-December, collecting 261 food contributions and over \$1,400 in cash. Second Harvest Heartland matched monetary donations, bringing the total over \$2,800. These funds went a long way toward purchasing food items for the less fortunate throughout the holiday season.

Local 3884 - City of Prior Lake, handed out Target and Fleet Farm gift cards at their member meeting on December 2. This was a welcome thank you after workers spent a long weekend over the Thanksgiving holiday working to dig their neighbors out from the recent snowstorm.

The University of Minnesota AFSCME locals hosted a Union Kids Cookies & Crafts party for union kids, parents, grandparents and other family on December 14 at the United Labor Centre in Minneapolis. The local provided pizza and a hot cocoa bar for all attendees as well.

AFSCME 3800 also ran a Holiday Food Drive. On December 20, they donated over 400 pounds of food to a local food shelf.

Finally, we're proud to share a special story of giving in this issue of Stepping Up.

On page 9, we share the story of Marvin Timmons, a terminally ill DNR employee able to spend precious time with his family thanks to the 900 hours of vacation time his fellow DNR employees donated.

AFSCME members' generosity extends far beyond the holidays.

This year, you supported each other - in the workplace and beyond. You donated to digital crowdfunding initiatives, attended fundraisers, delivered hot meals, made hospital and home visits, and shared your vacation time.



Thanks to the generosity of his coworkers, Marvin Timmons could focus on what matters most - his family. Get the full story on page 9.

In a year full of worker action, you didn't stop at supporting AFSCME members. You showed up and supported workers across the country.

You marched with UNITE HERE members and Amazon workers. You stood with UAW workers in Hudson, Wisconsin during the nationwide GM strike.

You made the trip to Chicago to support teachers on strike. You donated to strike funds and showed your solidarity in countless ways throughout this year of historic worker activism.

AFSCME members support and uplift workers all year round.

This holiday season, we're especially grateful for the countless acts of generosity from AFSCME members throughout 2019.



Several AFSCME locals, including Local 3800, ran food drives and donated the proceeds to their local food shelves.

2019 ELECTIONS RECAP

This year, AFSCME members showed up and elected pro-worker leaders across the country.

Election Day 2019 was a big victory for working families.

Across the country, voters elected pro-worker candidates for state and local government, providing further evidence of growing political momentum for working people.

Working families elected candidates who support worker rights, greater access to health care, expanding voting rights, making it easier for workers to form unions, providing quality public services and more.

In Minnesota, the overwhelming majority of AFSCME-endorsed candidates won their elections.

- In a critical special election for the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, AFSCME-endorsed Nicole Joy Frethem defeated former anti-worker legislator Randy Jessup to represent Ramsey County's District 1.
- Bloomington elected pro-labor Tim Busse as Mayor and endorsed candidates Jenna Carter, Dwayne Lowman, and Shawn Nelson to the City Council.
- Six of seven endorsed candidates for St. Paul City Council won their races, including Nelsie Yang, who became the first Hmong woman elected to the Council.
- In Duluth, Mayor Emily Larson won a second term, and endorsed candidates Janet Kennedy and Arik Forsman were elected to the Duluth City Council.
- All of the endorsed candidates for school board in St. Paul and two of three endorsed candidates in Duluth won their races.

Beyond Minnesota, AFSCME members helped achieve three huge pro-worker victories. After decades of partisan stagnation, Virginia elected the most

pro-worker legislature in a generation. In Kentucky, voters rejected their divisive, staunchly pro-Trump governor and elected Democrat Andy Beshear, who ran on protecting health care and workers' rights to collectively bargain.



Top: Mayor Emily Larson welcomes AFSCME members to Duluth for our 2019 Annual Convention in October. Photo: Brad Sigal, Sigal Photos (AFSCME Local 3800).
Middle: AFSCME members knocked thousands of doors for Nelsie Yang, who was elected to St Paul's Ward 6.
Bottom: First-time candidate Jenna Carter celebrates her election to the Bloomington City Council.

A week later, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards was reelected, defeating another Republican candidate who campaigned on President Trump's coattails.

Here are even more highlights from across the country this election season:

- In Pennsylvania, AFSCME-endorsed candidates won big in Philadelphia, including Mayor Jim Kenney, who won re-election in a landslide. And in the highly contested races for the city's seven council at-large seats, all five of the AFSCME-endorsed candidates came out on top.
- In Arizona, AFSCME-endorsed Tucson mayoral candidate Regina Romero rolled over her general election opponent by 55.7%-39.7%, becoming the city's first Latina mayor.
- In Texas, all AFSCME-endorsed candidates for the Houston City Council were successful. Three candidates won outright and four others made it to a December runoff, including HOPE Local 123 member Sandra Rodriguez.
- In New Jersey, AFSCME members defended large pro-worker majorities in the state legislature. Members also succeeded in winning a number of local races across the Garden State, especially in Mercer County, where they were particularly active.

These victories defy all the odds, and they tell a story that is impossible to ignore: pro-worker candidates are winning everywhere, up and down the ballot.

Hundreds of AFSCME members made these victories possible through one-on-one conversations with voters and get-out-the-vote campaigns. But the work is far from over – 2020 will be a turning point in our nation's history, and the results of next year's election will impact our workplaces and communities in countless ways. **Rest up, members – we've got a lot of work ahead!**

ORGANIZING FOR SERVICE

St. Stephens employees joined our union for themselves - and the clients they serve.

The Minneapolis-St Paul metro region is in the middle of a housing crisis. Home prices are rising, rents have skyrocketed, and construction of new housing has not kept pace with the number of people moving to the region. The housing squeeze harms the most vulnerable first; with no affordable options and nowhere else to go, more people must resort to surviving on the streets.

In Minneapolis, the staff at St.

Stephens Human Services are on the front lines of the Minneapolis metro region's affordable housing crisis.

But huge caseloads, low salaries, and secondhand trauma makes their work extremely difficult. These advocates for our most vulnerable neighbors found themselves with no one to fight for them. That's why, in early 2019,

"Sometimes there's fifty calls a day for me alone. And I can't be in more than one place at a time."



St. Stephens workers plan their organizing campaign.

these workers came together to organize and join a union.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

The affordable housing crisis means that more victims of homelessness need their services. Over the last several years, caseloads at St. Stephens have grown exponentially.

"Without a doubt, there are more people looking for shelter beds than

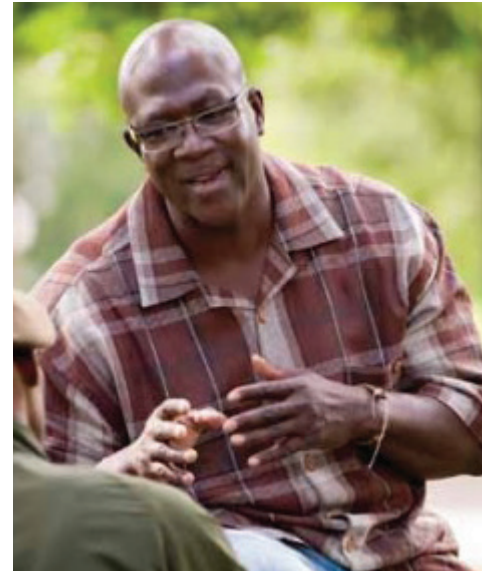
there are beds available," said Dan Lauer-Schumacher, who works in the overnight shelters that St. Stephens operates.

"Sometimes there's fifty calls a day for me alone, sometimes there's more" said Gino Nelson, one of St. Stephens's longest-serving employees. "And I can't be in more than one place at a time."

"The need has continued to grow," said Chris Knutson, who works as part of the Street Outreach Program. "Last July, we attempted to survey everyone who is experiencing homelessness. We found over 735 people, which is a new high. And that's been the story of the last few years."

Even getting more stable clients into housing is more difficult, says Chris Olson, a family housing advocate at St. Stephens. "Many landlords do everything in their power to put something in the housing application that will cut a family on public assistance out. It's pretty sad."

The caseloads are not just large; they



Many employees, like Gino Nelson, make notable contributions to the community through and even beyond their jobs.

are mentally and emotionally difficult. Working with people in crisis means that St. Stephens employees also deal with exhaustion, safety concerns, and secondhand trauma.

"People are doing home visits, working in the shelters overnight, sometimes without a lot of support," said Megan Fatheree, a targeted prevention case manager. "The front desk has a lot of vulnerable people coming in that don't have much of a cup to draw on in terms of patience."

All these challenges are compounded by low salaries. This is not an accident, as shelter staff Dan Lauer-Schumacher explained.

"Instead of having employees in the county, which pays more and provides benefits, we subcontract those out to nonprofits who are able to provide that work at a lower cost point."

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But these “savings” are made on the backs of non-profit workers, who are often paid half of what unionized County employees earn with much more limited benefits.

This has a dramatic effect on workers, who struggle to stretch their low salaries in order to make ends meet.

“I see so many of my coworkers having to work second jobs just to make ends meet,” said Olson.

HUGE CONTRIBUTIONS, BUT LITTLE RECOGNITION

The lack of recognition from management added insult to injury for St. Stephens employees. As one of the longest-serving St. Stephens employees, Gino Nelson has received numerous awards for his service, including a McKnight Award in 2012.

“When they called me, I thought it was someone playing a joke on me,” said Nelson, laughing.

Despite the community’s appreciation,

Nelson still didn’t receive the recognition he deserved at work.

“When I won the award, I invited my then-supervisor to come to the ceremony, and the supervisor told me that they could not be there. That was painful for me,” he said. “There was lots of support from people I didn’t even know across the state. And behind it all, donations went up here when I got the award, but nothing increased in my pocket.”

ORGANIZING CAMPAIGN BEGINS

In late 2018, St. Stephens employees began to meet and discuss ways they could address the many problems they experienced at work.

Founding organizing team member Casey Holmstrom said one-on-one conversations were a critical part of building support. “For us, it’s easy because we’re social workers. We ask people this every day, so asking a coworker what they need is so first nature,” she said.

Others at St. Stephens came on board quickly. “I was very buoyed

by the fact that, here was a bunch of 20-somethings and 30-somethings, getting involved in recognizing what they could do to better their workplace, which ultimately better the lives of our clients,” said Olson.

ELECTION RESULTS

In July, St. Stephens held their NLRB election and won by a landslide. 88% of the St. Stephens workforce voted; 80% of those supported unionization.

CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

In September, the newly-formed St. Stephens negotiating team sat down with management for their first round of contract negotiations.

Knutson says the chance to negotiate with management is exciting. “When else do you get to sit across the table from your managers, instead of being told no and stewing about it with your coworkers in the cubicle?”

“EXPANDING THE HORIZON OF WHAT’S POSSIBLE”

But even before the negotiating team settles on a contract, workers report a clear change in the organization’s culture. “Our whole horizon of what’s possible was expanded through this process,” said Fatheree.

Support for the union has also increased, said Holmstrom. “Instead of being hesitant, I think people are more interested in saying, ‘I’m with the union.’”

While St. Stephens workers fight to improve the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors, AFSCME Council 5 is proud to help them fight for dignity in the workplace.



Top to Bottom and LTR: Chris Knutson, Chris Olson, Dequan Dominick, Jennifer Ritter, Deran Cadotte, Nick Stewart-Bloch, Tina Meinarts, Mike Grewatz.

You, Your Pension, and Your Union

When it comes to retirement plans, most working Americans have only a few options. For many public workers, though, a pension promises a secure, dignified retirement after a lifetime of service.

In many states, public pension systems have been decimated by anti-worker forces more interested in lining their own pockets than investing in the people who do America's work and produce our nation's wealth. Like in many private-sector industries across the country, big-money interests have deflected the brunt of their financial woes onto the backs of workers – and the results haven't been pretty.

In Kansas, policymakers managed to decimate the state's public pensions in under two decades. **The plans, fully funded in 2000, now face a \$43 billion deficit** due to politicians' failure (or refusal) to fund the plans and make responsible market investment decisions.

Here in Minnesota, we've been diligent – and successful – in protecting our public pensions from such attacks. But we need to remain vigilant and combat the broader anti-worker narrative

that threatens to undermine the rights and benefits we've earned.

So how does a pension system work, exactly? And what makes Minnesota's pension system unique?

Let's start with the basics. Minnesota has three major pension systems. The Minnesota State Retirement System (MSRS) includes most state employees, ranging from State Patrol officers, Metropolitan Council workers, and employees at both the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State University systems.

PERA (the Public Employees Retirement Association) administers retirement benefits for most local government employees and many school district workers. Finally, most public school and Minnesota State University teachers and faculty are covered under the Teachers

Retirement Association plan (TRA). Most AFSCME members and retirees participate in either MSRS or PERA.

Our union pension is a *defined benefit plan (DB)*, rather than a *defined contribution (DC) plan*. Why is that important? Because one is guaranteed, and the other is not. Since the 1980s, corporations have tried to shift workers to DC plans in an effort to shirk the responsibility of a safe retirement for their employees. With a DB plan, our members have a retirement they can count on. **Get the full comparison between DC and DB plans below!**

The strength of our pension systems is not an accident. For decades, public employees in Minnesota have fought back against attempts to underfund and undermine the retirement benefits we've earned.

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Defined Contribution Plans (401K-style)	Defined Benefit Plans (Pensions)
Employers may contribute a set amount, "match" employee contributions, or contribute nothing at all toward employees' retirement.	Employers contribute a set amount to the fund based on how much money is needed to pay benefits to all workers.
Employees carry all the risk , making savings vulnerable to economic downturns.	Risk is shared among everyone paying into the pension, making them much more durable through the ups and downs of the market.
Individuals must manage their own funds, or pay big Wall Street firms for their financial advice.	Professional pension administrators manage the funds and serve workers, not Wall Street .
DC plans cost twice as much to manage as DB plans.	DB plans are less expensive – and more cost effective – to manage.
There is no guarantee the money will be there when you retire.	Monthly payments from your pension fund are guaranteed – for the rest of your life .

PENSIONS

By the Numbers

48,134

Number of MN jobs supported by state and local pensions.

\$101 billion

The amount of money managed by the State Board of Investment (SBI) - including trust funds, retirement funds, and state cash accounts.

\$9.53

Pension funds generate \$9.53 in economic activity for every dollar that Minnesota taxpayers put into pension funds.

583,153

Number of public employees covered by state pension plans.

2/3

The proportion of the pension fund that come from investment earnings. Only a third of the value comes from direct employer and employee contributions.

That's a lot of generated value!

\$1,692

Average initial monthly benefit across pension plans.

Defined-benefit pensions like ours can be the difference between a comfortable retirement and decades of scarcity.

More than 20% of retired Minnesotans live in poverty, surviving solely on Social Security income. Public pensions are modest, ranging from \$1,200 to \$2,300 a month.

A typical AFSCME retiree has pension benefits of about \$14,000 a year.

For most retirees, that income is the difference between living in poverty and living securely, with dignity.

Pensions have a major economic impact beyond the individuals who earned them.

According to the National Institute on Retirement Security's Pensionomics 2018, pension payments to retirees are crucial to fueling job growth and economic output nationwide.

Here in Minnesota, retiree spending contributes significantly to our state's economic strength. In 2016, pension expenditures in Minnesota supported 48,134 jobs, \$3.9 billion in added value to the state, and \$3.1 billion in direct economic impact across the state – with a total economic impact of \$7.2 billion.

As public service providers, AFSCME members have a vested interest in making sure workers – the major stakeholders in our pension policies – have a seat at the table when it comes to making decisions about the retirement benefits we all deserve.

That's why we encourage our members to serve on the pension boards – and to show up when the decision-makers need to hear from workers most.

We're proud to support three AFSCME members on the MSRS Board, and two more on the PERA Board.



"That's the last bill I'll sign as Governor of Minnesota, and what a great one to end on," said Governor Mark Dayton as he signed the bipartisan pension bill in 2018.

AFSCME members are educated, dedicated, and tireless in the fight to protect the retirements we deserve.

We've used our people power to defend the benefits we've earned, and we have the legislative track record to prove it.

But we know we can't rest on our accomplishments.

Every year, politicians at all levels of government look to balance their budgets by stealing money out of pension funds and, by extension, out of the hands of retirees who earned it.

Others seek to make public sector union members less powerful by restricting the pension benefits they can demand in negotiations.

In the years to come, we must continue the long tradition of protecting retirement security for ourselves, and the generations of workers who will follow.

Vacation Donation a Game-Changer for DNR Award Winner with Terminal Diagnosis

Marvin Timmons has always been a union man. He's also a veteran, a "mechanical guy," a loving husband, grandfather and brother, a lover of animals and nature, and, in his own words, a "forever optimist."

And to his coworkers and supervisors at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, where Marvin spent the past 15 summers working in building maintenance, grounds keeping and security at Upper Sioux State Park near Granite Falls. For DNR employees, Marvin was much more than a colleague; he was an inspiration.

So when Marvin, a longtime activist of Local 694, was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer in the spring of 2018, his DNR family sprung to action. "My supervisor told me about this vacation donation thing – she got the ball rolling and got me the paperwork," Marvin recounted about when he first learned of the program, which lets state employees share vacation hours to eligible coworkers facing hardship.

"I was overwhelmed when I learned about it, and curious as to where such a

great program got started," Marvin said. When he first learned of the benefit, Marvin admitted that he felt a little guilty accepting time from his coworkers.

"The working man knows. We have the rights we have today because of unions."

"I know where I'm headed. I didn't want to take hours from anyone else," he explained.

Those worries dissipated when AFSCME members from across the state **joined together and donated more than 900 hours of vacation** – enough to carry him through his

15th season at the park and secure the pension he's been working toward for the past decade and a half.

Marvin Timmons, a "lifelong union man," said he's always been thankful for what unions have accomplished for working people – but he was blown away by the generosity of his AFSCME family and the huge impact this program had on his life and the lives of his coworkers.

"The working man knows," he said. "We have the rights we have today because of unions. It's the camaraderie, knowing someone's got your back, making sure nobody takes advantage of you. But I was



Thanks to the generosity of his coworkers, Marvin Timmons was able to spend precious time at home with his family.

overwhelmed in learning about the vacation donation program."

The real gift of the benefit, Marvin said, is the quality time he's able to spend with his family. The peace of having those loose ends tied up allowed him to focus on what's really important: his loved ones.

He filled his life (and his heart) to the brim by actively bringing people into his family. Following his first marriage, Marvin said he wasn't looking for a relationship. But then he met Sonya, and everything changed. "The first time she walked into the room, I saw her whole aura," Marvin remembered. "I actually saw a glow around her. I just knew right then."

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And with that meeting came a new family. The pair, married since 2003, live just down the road from Sonya's daughter Danielle and her three children – a comforting, energizing presence for Marvin as he continued treatment and faced the reality of his diagnosis.

Thanks to Ancestry.com, Marvin even connected with relatives he'd never met. He reconnected with several siblings from across the country – even a long-lost sister in Duluth.

A few months following his diagnosis, Marvin's DNR family showed their appreciation for his dedication to conserving our state's natural beauty and serving park visitors. He was presented with the 2019 DNR Commissioner's Award in recognition of his years of service. DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen was in attendance to present the award, along with a healthy crowd of friends Marvin has made during his years of service. Commissioner Strommen described Marvin as "the face of the park" during the award ceremony.



Marvin, receiving the Commissioner's award from DNR Commissioner Strommen. Photo via Marvin's GoFundMe page.

Commissioner Strommen also took the opportunity to thank Marvin for his service in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War, presenting him with a commemorative medallion featuring the seal of the State of Minnesota on one side, and a yellow ribbon – a symbol of support for veterans – on the opposite.

For Marvin, the highlight of the ceremony wasn't the plaque or the medallion. It was the people.

Dozens of former coworkers and supervisors attended, including faces Marvin hadn't seen in years. "I felt really honored. I saw folks there – past managers, coworkers, campground hosts – people you'd seen year after year. Come to find out," he quipped, "I guess they kind of like me!"

Despite his terminal diagnosis, Marvin maintained a positive outlook and a powerful sense of gratitude. "If I were able to go back in time and change any part of my life, I wouldn't," he said. "I tried to follow the path laid out before me, and all was meant to teach and to learn. I'm very happy with the way my life turned out – and I am curious as to where it goes next."

When asked for life advice, Marvin kept it short and sweet. "Be honest. Go with your gut. Work hard, but don't forget to have fun." And last but not least, work union!"

Marvin's last day at the Upper Sioux Agency State Park was October 16, 2019. He spent two precious months at home with his family before entering hospice on January 2. He passed away, surrounded by loved ones, on the morning of January 6, 2020.

While the generosity of his AFSCME family at the State of Minnesota carried him through his

15th season at the park, Marvin's family continues to face financial pressure as they mourn his loss. His daughter Danielle has launched a GoFundMe campaign: you can make a contribution at www.gofundme.com/f/marvin-timmons.

Marvin Timmons was a shining example of a humble, kind-hearted, and dedicated public servant. He spent his career helping Minnesotans enjoy our natural resources, and helped those around him understand the power of collective action and his union.

His colleagues at the Minnesota DNR honored that legacy by following his lead: they sacrificed the vacation benefits they had earned to ensure that Marvin had the final months he deserved.

This issue of Stepping Up is dedicated to Marvin, his DNR siblings, and the generosity and solidarity of our entire AFSCME family.