

AFSCME Council 31

2025 Legislative Agenda

Support responsible budget and adequate revenues for state and local governments

For the past several years, Illinois budgets have been stabilized by federal pandemic relief funds along with unexpected overperforming tax revenue driven by economic conditions related to the pandemic. With the expiration of federal COVID relief money, economic conditions normalizing and lack of revenue reform, Illinois' structural deficit threatens any progress made towards improving the State's fiscal health. Illinois is projected to face a \$3.1 billion budget deficit in FY2026. Moreover, there is the very real threat of steep cuts in federal funding to state and local governments in Illinois as the new administration in DC sets about implementing its plan to slash federal spending. All the while, demand for vital public services remains strong and workforce shortages place significant strains on the public service workers who strive to meet the needs of Illinois citizens. AFSCME will advocate for actions in the General Assembly that will strengthen public services, protect good jobs, and address staffing shortages, including:

- Oppose any cutback to vital state services, facility closures, or layoff of state employees.
- Oppose any legislation that would undermine adequate funding for local government services, including but not limited to, any effort to reduce local governments' share of the income tax distributed through the Local Government Distributive Fund.
- Support efforts to close corporate tax loopholes and oppose efforts to expand such unfair giveaways.
- Support revenue-raising measures that would reinforce the progress made towards responsible budgeting, while opposing measures that would reduce income to the state.
- Support legislation that would expand the responsible taxing authority of local governments and oppose legislation limiting that authority.

Stabilize pension funds and address inadequacies and inequities of Tier 2 pension benefits

As Tier 1 pension participants retire and the Tier 2 workforce grows, the lesser retirement benefits are proving to be a barrier to the recruitment and retention of much needed staff throughout the public sector. Corporate forces continue their efforts to strip public service workers of their retirement security and are employing new, stealthier strategies intended to deceive public employees into believing that cutting pension benefits is necessary to stabilize the pension funds. AFSCME will:

- Support legislation to address inadequacies and inequities in the pension systems.
- Continue to press for a solution to the pension funding crisis that is constitutional and ensures retirement security for public employees.
- Oppose any effort to amend the Illinois Constitution to remove protections against pension diminishment.
- Oppose efforts to force public employees into risky defined-contribution retirement plans.
- Oppose unconstitutional cuts to the pension benefits of employees or retirees in any public pension system.

Address staffing crisis in the public sector

The State of Illinois has an alarmingly high number of vacant positions—estimated at more than 7,000—across a variety of state agencies. This severe staffing shortfall is jeopardizing the quality of services provided to Illinois residents and damaging the health and wellbeing of current employees who struggle valiantly to fulfill the state’s missions and mandates. AFSCME will:

- Support reforms that will remove bureaucratic barriers that prevent hiring new employees or promoting current employees in a timely manner.
- Lobby for the implementation of innovative concepts to better attract qualified applicants for state employment and as well as retain the current workforce.

Protect and expand workers’ rights

Despite great progress in developing a framework of laws that seek to foster strong union rights, fairer policies, and safe working conditions for Illinois workers, many problems remain. Moreover, the corporate elite and right-wing forces have launched a massive and sophisticated nationwide campaign to drive down wages and destroy unions. Led in our state by the Illinois Policy Institute, these anti-union forces continue to press to weaken all laws that protect workers, whether in the private or public sector. AFSCME will:

- Support all measures that improve workplace safety and reduce the dangers that employees face on the job.
- Support efforts to ensure that state and local government funds are not used to block workers’ efforts to form unions.
- Fight any effort to weaken or diminish the collective bargaining rights provided to employees by Illinois State Law.
- Support efforts to expand collective bargaining rights to public employees currently excluded from labor laws while opposing any attempts to strip away bargaining rights from employees currently covered by the Illinois Public Employee Labor Relations Act or the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act.
- Oppose any efforts to diminish workers’ compensation or unemployment insurance benefits.

- Support expansion of unemployment insurance benefits to include school district and university employees who are not afforded the opportunity to work during the summer months.
- Support strengthening remedies when employers commit unfair labor practices.

Support adequate funding for state universities/equity for employees

Despite recent funding increases, state universities are still struggling to recover from decades of inadequate state funding which has resulted in substantial cutbacks at many campuses. Moreover, state universities have lagged in raising the pay of support staff as demonstrated in a study that showed a disparity of more than 20% between university employees and state employees doing the same work. AFSCME will continue to work in coalition with other unions, educational advocates and student organizations to:

- Improve state university funding.
- Establish a minimum wage (higher than state minimum wage) for university employees.
- Guarantee the right of unions to bargain better standards than those in university civil service rules.
- Oppose efforts to weaken State University Civil Service System rules that seek to ensure fair treatment of university employees.

Fight privatization of public services and assets

As the State of Illinois, public universities and local governments look to balance their budgets, all too often public officials are looking to privatize public services and assets as a way to save money without any regard for the impact on employees or the quality of services provided. Time and again, taxpayers suffer the consequences of these ill-conceived schemes. AFSCME will:

- Oppose all legislation that would have the effect of privatizing any service currently provided by public employees.
- Oppose efforts to weaken or repeal the laws that currently restrict privatization of any public services, such as the law prohibiting privatization of school district support services.
- Oppose efforts to expand charter schools and press to ensure that available educational funding is devoted to public education.
- Oppose efforts to sell or lease publicly run nursing homes.
- Oppose public private partnerships that would open the door to privatization of essential public services.

Fight to improve wage levels in community disability agencies and other AFSCME-represented nonprofit agencies

Thousands of workers serving individuals with developmental disabilities in private community-based agencies, as well as other human service providers, depend on

funding from the state to improve wages. AFSCME has been leading the way in the fight for additional state funding earmarked for wage increases. Last year AFSCME helped win the sixth straight funding increase to help improve wages for direct support personnel in community agencies in three years. AFSCME will:

- Support passage of legislation providing for a \$2.00 per hour wage increase for direct support personnel in community disability agencies.
- Press for adequate state funding to ensure fair wages for frontline workers in providing services in other private human services agencies, such as those serving at-risk youth and the mentally ill.
- Work for legislation to help organize new units in this sector by limiting employer anti-union activities.

Fight for Affordable Prescription Drugs

Prescription drug prices continue to climb at inexplicable rates, forcing working families and retirees to choose between food, housing and life-sustaining medications. The cost of prescription drugs is not correlated to the actual cost of research, development or production by pharmaceutical companies and does not reflect the public subsidies, tax breaks, or taxpayer funds for research and development provided to these companies by government agencies. AFSCME will fight for the passage of legislation to address prescription drug affordability.