

JULY 28, 2021



A Message From the President

On June 22, AFSCME Local 2822's contract negotiations were kicked off with a rally at the Government Center in downtown Minneapolis—where five other local unions, activists, and supporters gathered in solidarity to celebrate their hard work.

Local 2822 President Ali Fuhrman addressed the attendees with the following speech (edited for format).

Greetings and welcome to our contract negotiations kick-off rally!

So much work has been done to get us here. I want to thank every individual who spoke with their co-workers, filled out a survey, attended a Master Team meeting, attended an Education Engagement and Outreach meeting. To everyone . . . participating in our negotiations at the table and [to] everyone who is working hard in the office—and at home—to win us the contract we deserve: thank you!

Now I am going to lay out the basics of what we are asking for . . . and I won't have time for everything.

Let me preface my comments with this:

- We are asking for a lot because we deserve it.
- We have gone through a lot to continue to serve the community.
- We have fought for what we need every step of the way, and we're going to keep fighting.

After months of collecting input—from members, stewards, and activists—these are the priorities we have identified for these negotiations.

We identified 5 wage issues:

Equal Raises for All

[The] employer already agreed to one of our demands before we were able to make it. Two months ago, County commissioners passed a \$20 minimum wage increase for all county employees. [Now] we need an equal increase for all. We are asking for a \$5 increase for everyone. We need to equalize the [pay increase] so we're all moving up.

Rising Cost of Living

This year we got a 2% cost of living adjustment to keep our wages in line with inflation. But, from April of 2020 to April of this year, inflation rose by 4%. We're paying more for basic goods and, while the Central Bank anticipates inflation to go up by 2% next year, many Federal Reserve officials anticipate the increase [to] be 3–4%. [We] need an increase that actually keeps up with the cost of living. We Are proposing a 7% cost of living adjustment for each year of the contract.

Pop the Top

Many workers have been stuck at the top of the pay scale for too long, and many of us make less than our peers at other counties [and] in the private sector. That's why we're calling on a \$5 increase to the top of every pay scale.

Steps

[Over the] last round of negotiations, the employer stole steps from us and replaced it with a 3% annual performance review increase. [We] were not prepared to strike and we had to eat this loss. This time around we [are] organized and will have this tool at our disposal . . . This time we need to rectify our past loss and improve upon it!

Instead of simply calling for the old step system back, we are calling for a step system that gets us to the top faster. For some it takes 15 years or more to get to the top of the pay scale. With our proposal it will never take longer than five.

Promotions

[Let's not] forget about promotions—currently they're at 3%, [and] we want to raise them to 5%.

And our wage proposal would not be complete if we didn't think about [those] who work for the County but are . . . employed by a third party company. [Service Employees International Union] Local 26 workers are contracted and make less than \$20 an hour. We are calling for a \$20 minimum wage for ALL Hennepin County workers.

Our other proposals fall into 8 general categories:**Child and Dependent Care Issues**

All parents and caregivers, [particularly] mothers and women have been slammed by the pandemic. [They struggle] to find daycare or [try] to achieve the impossible: work and take care of their children at the same time. Women and caregiver issues have been ignored for far too long.

[We] are calling for 160 hours of paid leave for parents and caregivers for emergency situations such as school closures; \$5,250 annual contribution to dependent care expense account; onsite childcare; and 12 weeks paid parental leave.

COVID and Emergency Issues

We will also be calling on the county to use the \$246 million dollars in federal COVID funding to PAY us back for the costs we incurred during the pandemic—including a \$200 a month stipend to cover internet and utilities, \$1500 for office equipment for at home workers, and hazard pay to the tune of \$500 a month for onsite workers. This would be retroactive to the start of the pandemic.

And, for the workers who were furloughed last summer and [used] up all their paid leave balances, we call for a return of those leave balances.

We will not pay for this pandemic, especially when AFSCME has fought so hard at the national level to ensure local aid to cover these costs.

Stipends and Extra Pay

Many of us are saddled with student loan debt. New legislation has allowed employers to make contributions to student loan reimbursement as a tax free benefit. We are calling on the county to offer the IRS maximum of up to \$5,250 for student loan repayment.

[And] getting to work and parking is expensive—especially for those who work downtown. We're calling for a 100% subsidy for transit passes and \$250 a month parking reimbursement.

We're also proposing increases to the language stipend to \$100 per pay period, \$20 [per] hour, and increasing night and weekend shift differentials to \$2—[and a] host of other proposals to take care of shift workers at the institutions and the sheriffs office.

Racial Equity / Non-discrimination

Racism, discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying continue to be serious issues in the workplace. We are proposing stronger protections for protected classes as well as union representation during the county's internal non-discrimination respectful workplace process.

Paid Leave

From the pandemic to the fight for justice for George Floyd—we experienced tremendous grief, loss, and anxiety that made it difficult to work. We have exhausted our leave balances.

That's why [we are] asking for a large increase in the number of sick, vacation and PTO days. We are also calling for an expansion of bereavement leave to allow for 160 hours of leave [to] be used [in the event of] deaths of friends and co-workers. Additional leave requests include 3 days paid leave for traumatic events at work, paid leave for building closures . . . and more.

Safety

The pandemic showed us how unions are essential to worker safety. We are calling for increased representation on all emergency and safety committees as well as protections from client threats and harassment—and [provisions for] PPE and other safety measures for future pandemics.

Union Rights

We have a huge list of proposals to strengthen our rights as union members on the job including: seniority for transfers and promotions; making step denials grievable; expanding the rights of temporary employees; and protecting permanent full time jobs by moving LD and temporary employees into permanent positions, and limiting the use of volunteers and contracted services.

WE have so much to fight for and—when we fight for safe staffing levels [and] well-compensated employees—we are also fighting for the community. The community needs our services now more than ever. We have put a tremendous amount of work into putting these proposals together. Now we need to get together and fight for them!

To read our entire proposal, please visit <https://www.afscmelocal2822.org/negotiations>

Contract Negotiations: Who's Who

Do you ever wonder who's representing you at the bargaining table, and who they are up against? Meet the people who represent us—as well as those who represent the interests of our employer.

AFSCME Local 2822's Table Team

- Rita Watson (County Attorney's Office)
- Sue Olson (Department of Community Corrections)
- Anthony Ware (Health and Human Services)
- Dari Kolstad (Health and Human Services)
- Sharaunta Beach (Hennepin Health)
- Daniel Winker (IT)
- Ali Fuhrman (Library)
- Jayne Mikulay (Library)
- Shane Clune (Library)
- Regina Kittrell (Northpoint Health and Wellness)
- Alex Hilst (Resident and Real Estate Services)
- Colleen Brown (Sheriff's Office)
- Val Wiggins (Sheriff's Office)
- Local 2822 Business Agent: Kate Black

Employer Bargaining Representatives

- Jeffrey Deters (Central Services)
- Lisa McFerrin (Human Resources)
- Jesse Winkler (Human Resources)
- Bobby Jackson (Human Services)
- Blaine Robertson (IT)
- Michelle Velasco (Juvenile Detention)
- Jennifer Belde (Juvenile Detention)
- Tonya DePriest (Library)
- Melissa Lallak (Medical Examiner)
- Shawn Wilson (Medical Examiner)
- Anna Abruzzese (Resident and Real Estate Services)
- Captain Mary Jerde (Sheriff's Office)
- Employer Labor Relations Representative: Tilena Pajibo
- Employer Labor Relations Director: Kathy Megarry

To learn more about our employer's team, and to see who is representing the five other local unions who join us in these negotiations, visit Hennepin County's Labor Relations page.

Frontline Staff Share Pandemic Experiences During Negotiations

The following are testimonies from frontline staff regarding compensation for risks or costs incurred as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic shared during the negotiation session on July 14.

Last year the County received 220 million dollars for COVID issues. This year the County received an additional 246 million dollars for almost half a billion total. None of this money has been used towards hazard pay or stipends for remote workers. We need retroactive hazard pay for these workers and future state of emergencies and pandemics, specifically a \$500 monthly stipend for workers who had to report to work during the pandemic.

Hello. My name is Hannah Hautman.

I work at the Ridgedale Service Center. I am here to speak about why we deserve retroactive hazard pay of \$500 per month & hazard pay for any future emergencies. I would like to start with the last Meet & Confer I attended in June. During this meeting our Division Manager discussed that she was working on obtaining hazard pay for us through a Covid-19 relief bill. HR and Labor Relations responded that it would be too hard to determine who would be entitled to the hazard pay. Now I know I am paraphrasing, but “too hard” seems a bit of a cop-out answer. For perspective, I would like to share some of the things I did beginning in May of 2020 that I would have deemed “too hard” but managed to accomplish.

- Returned to work while fearing for my life and how working could endanger the lives of my loved ones.
- Adapted to numerous changes in safety protocols including ones I personally reviewed and suggested changes to Hennepin County that were overlooked.
- Continued to show up for work when staff were relocated from my center leaving us understaffed, right when Hennepin county had increased our appointment levels.
- Learned to work through headaches caused by mask pressure points on a weekly basis.
- Renewed hundreds of drivers licenses that didn't need to be renewed due to the governor's extension of license expiration dates.
- Explained to customers why I wouldn't accept their documents after they had licked their fingers.
- Said “please keep your mask over your nose” hundreds of times every week.
- Wore surgical gloves all day to protect my hands from the cleaning supplies we used between every customer.
- And most recently I kept calling numbers as the county changed its masking policy with no new support structure in place despite having at least two weeks to see the change coming.

All of these are duties that are outside of our realm as Service Center Representatives. We all did these and more, we all feared for our lives, and we all deserve to be compensated for what we risked to keep serving Hennepin County residents during this unprecedented time. Thank you.

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Frontline Staff Share Pandemic Experiences During Negotiations

Hello. My name is Amy L.

I have worked at Hennepin County Service Center for over seven years. I have over 20 years experience in my field and am a Certified Titling Specialist.

I would like to bring up the point of not receiving hazard pay in a timely fashion for staff who worked on site doing essential services for our customers during the heart of the pandemic.

Despite myself being a high-risk individual as declared by the CDC and documented by my doctor, I came to work each day providing essential services. When I received the call asking me to come back to the office to work, I responded positively before any threats of not being able to return to your home center were put out. I was well aware how essential our services were to our customers and was willing to assist in any way I could.

Upon arriving back in the office, I was very disappointed to see Hennepin County had still not installed the permanent plexiglass despite it being installed in multiple private sector businesses. I had many anxiety attacks over the subpar temporary shields designed on the fly by building services, generic to everywhere, not tailored to each unique center. They were shoddy at best. From this lack of initiative on Hennepin County's part, I personally suffered from extreme anxiety attacks where my colleagues had to help calm me down because I was so upset at the thought that I was potentially risking my life for my job, a job I love and enjoy, but to what end? I relied on my mask, cleaning, and extreme hand washing to keep me safe.

To find out that Hennepin County is trying to deny hazard pay is unacceptable and disregards all the sacrifices we made coming back to work when it was not safe to serve our residents.

My husband and many friends who work private sector jobs received both immediate hourly increases and a substantial lump sum payment within the past couple months, as we began to get vaccinated and return to a more normal business practice. Those private sector employers received far fewer Federal Care Dollars than Hennepin County, however, they made it a point to pay their employees accordingly and offer a lump sum bonus, as we near the end of the pandemic, to ensure they felt appreciated and valued. I feel neither.

I find the fact that this even needs to be said more than disgusting and makes me question if I am valued as an employee at Hennepin County. I have many years of experience and personally helped come up with the procedures we created on the fly to assist our customers in this new ever-changing environment. Even as recently as last week—when we started allowing more walk-ins with no procedure in place as to how we would do this—it was the staff who came up with the solutions.

Please don't break your arm patting yourself on the back for having ours. Until you've truly been in a Service Center in the heart of a pandemic, you have no idea what you are really discussing.

**If you would like to speak during an upcoming negotiations session, contact our organizer:
organizer@afscmelocal2822.org**

DOCCR Lunch Fight, Treat ALL Staff with Dignity!

Adult Probation Field Services Office Specialists were given a new directive, by Jen Belde, Strategic Resource Manager, on June 25 via email. The email states, "According to DOCCR Hours of Work and Overtime Policy, Policy Statement 8:

Employees are not permitted to combine the two 15-minute rest periods with and/or add to the period of time an employee takes for the unpaid lunch period. As such please ensure you are not utilizing your 15 minute breaks in a way that violates the policy.

This new adherence to the policy was effective immediately. Support staff in Adult Field Services had previously been allowed to combine their 30 minute lunch with their two 15 minute breaks. This past practice had been in effect for over 40 years. It was clear to staff that this new directive from Jen was only going to be enforced upon the Office Specialist staff, no other employees in Adult Field Services. The policy referred to is from 2015. It is outdated and has not been enforced.

After several meetings with multiple Office Specialists and union activists, we decided the best course of action would be to file a "class action grievance" stating this was a violation of past practices and also a discriminatory action—being that the Office Specialists in Adult Field Services are the most diverse group of workers in our department, and this policy is only being enforced on this one particular job class.

We will continue to bring the lunch fight to our members and to management, until it is rectified. Please treat the Office Specialists in Adult Field Services, DOCCR, with the same dignity and respect the other members of our union and department are allotted. Thank You!

Remember to Use Your P&A Card!

Because of our efforts last summer fighting for more money in your pocket, you should have received a debit card in the mail in December 2020. This debit card has \$400 (singles)/\$700 (everyone else) of health care money for YOU! (Because of IRS rules the employer cannot contribute more than \$550 per year. So those in the \$700 category received \$400 in January and will receive the remaining \$300 next year.)

To use the card: Swipe the card at the point of service, like you would any debit card, or use to pay online or paper bills. Save your receipts in case documentation is requested. Here is a list of eligible items. More information is available here through the county.

Marilee Springer reached out to let us know she used her full balance:

I used the card at Walgreens. They were able to put it on as Express Pay which made it VERY convenient for me. I didn't need to take the card with me each time I went to pick up my prescriptions. That's the only thing that I used the card for, prescription medications. The only problem that I ran into is when I got to the end of the money and didn't realize that they had taken my Discover card off of the Express Pay because I could have only ONE card on at a time, but fortunately, I had a credit card that I could give them to put the remainder of the bill on.

Have you used your card yet? We'd love to hear about your experience.

Email kate.maclam@afscmelocal2822.org to share!

Resources for Workers

What's the 2-1-1?

Apply for rent help, find medical resources, speak to someone who can connect you to the right people to get you the help that you need.

Call Toll Free: 800-543-7709 or (651) 291-0211
Or visit: www.211unitedway.org



Refunds for Furloughed Employees

Furloughed in 2020? You may be entitled to a larger tax refund. The IRS is recalculating taxes on unemployment benefits noting that, on March 11, legislators signed a bill which:

[Allows] taxpayers who earned less than \$150,000 . . . to exclude unemployment compensation up to \$20,400 if married filing jointly and \$10,200 for all other eligible taxpayers. The legislation excludes only 2020 unemployment benefits from taxes. Because the change occurred after some people filed their taxes, the IRS will . . . make the appropriate change to their return, which may result in a refund.

For more information visit:

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-to-recalculate-taxes-on-unemployment-benefits-refunds-to-start-in-may>

Burial Assistance

Grieving the death of a loved one is hard enough. Paying for their burial can be overwhelming. Know that Hennepin County offers burial assistance for county employees.

Important! Before purchasing any burial services, read the county's policy:

<https://www.hennepin.us/residents/human-services/burial-assistance>

County policy notes, "Applications must be submitted within 14 days of the date of death [and] the county will not reimburse payments already made."

For more information call (612) 348-7984
Or email: hsph.burialasst@hennepin.us

AFSCME Local 2822 Steward Assistance

Phone: 612-470-2822
Email: AFSCME2822steward@gmail.com

Weingarten Rights:

If you are called to a meeting with a manager, you have the right to have a union representative, officer, or steward present if you feel the discussion could in any way lead to being disciplined or terminated, or affect your personal working conditions. Until a representative arrives, you have the right to not participate in the meeting. Stewards are assigned by the chief stewards.

Need to Become a Member?

Never go around to filling out that membership card? There are several ways to become a member of Local 2822:

- Sign up online at <https://members.afscmemn.org> and click on "Sign Up Now"
- Call the AFSCME Council 5 Membership Action Network: 651-450-4990
- Contact our Membership Secretary, Rita Watson by email or send in the card below: rita.watson@hennepin.us

To sign up as a full union member or to get answers to questions about AFSCME and membership benefits, please fill send filled cards to: Rita Watson, County Attorney's Office, Mail Code 510.

AFSCME Dental Plan Contacts

Health Partners:
952-883-5000
healthpartners.com
Group Number: 35991

AFSCME:
651-450-4990
Email: dental@afscmeMN.org
<https://members.afscmemn.org>

Events

AUGUST MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Wednesday, August 4, 6:30 p.m.

Attend a monthly membership meeting!

Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83057821969>

Meeting ID: 830 5782 1969
Join by phone: +1 312 626 6799

CONTRACT ASSEMBLY #4

Thursday, August 5th at 6:00pm

Join all Hennepin County AFSCME Locals—and the discussion—from the latest round of contract negotiations!

Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86868411936>

Meeting ID: 868 6841 1936
Join by phone: +1 312 626 6799

WEAR GREEN ON CONTRACT NEGOTIATION DAYS!

Wear GREEN to work or if you work remotely change your profile picture to GREEN! Show your support for the negotiating team! Show your support for the Union contract we all deserve!

JULY 30 AUGUST 10 SEPTEMBER 8 SEPTEMBER 22

If you do not have an AFSCME t-shirt and would like to order one, email: alex.hilst@afscmelocal2822.org