

COVID-19 HEROES

Better pay and resources to the workers holding Maryland's social safety net together

Debra Graves-Latson *Baltimore City Department of Social Services*

"I have been employed with Social Services for 13 years. Until very recently, I worked in child welfare, and my charges ranged from babies to 21-year-olds. Imagine having a job where you are responsible for the welfare of a 16-year-old boy who is a chronic runaway. You have no idea where he is, if he's getting food, where he's sleeping. Now imagine how that responsibility would be during a pandemic. I worried about him being out there, especially when the world is upside down because of COVID. Does he have any PPE? Does he have relatives? He's just a kid. That's only one of the challenges I faced this past year as a family services caseworker. Also, I had to accompany children to be COVID-tested, and the wait time would sometimes be hours. Once, I knew the child I was with was hungry, waiting all that time. So we went to a fast-food restaurant and I bought him some food. He was so hungry. It's part of my responsibility, part of my job."



For as long and hard as she's worked, Debra, like all state employees, is stuck at a certain pay level, and her benefits have eroded over the years.



Miriam is still doing essential, frontline work. There is no doubt that she has been a COVID hero, keeping Maryland safe.

Miriam Doyle *Clifton T. Perkins Hospital Center*

"When COVID hit the hospital, all of a sudden my duties went from strategizing therapy, discharge, and reentry plans to hustling between patients, now quarantined with a potentially fatal disease no one really understood. Everyone was panicked. I tried hard to keep everyone calm and engaged. I had to get creative, like bringing in Spanish magazines someone asked for, a mythology book for someone else. The extreme challenge was daunting but it was part of my job."

"After graduate school, I thought I wanted to work in community-based services. But then I heard about this job, dealing with a stigmatized population, with people who are in tremendous psychic pain. I have always been drawn to disenfranchised people. I feel for them. I'm proud of the work I've been doing this past year, and I do feel appreciated by my department. But if compensation is a form of appreciation, sometimes I feel undervalued, especially when it comes to hazard pay."

Stand With AFSCME Council 3 COVID-19 Heroes



AFSCME COUNCIL 3 MEMBERS ARE COVID-19 HEROES

It's people like Debra and Miriam – with their heart, steady calm, and dedication – who keep Maryland cared for. Over the past year, thousands of state and higher education employees helped to make sure our state and campuses kept running, despite the worst pandemic in over 100 years. They had to deal with their own anxieties about a disease that was airborne, and often without adequate PPE or staffing levels.

STAGNANT WAGES HARM VITAL STATE SERVICES

The denial of adequate wage increases, state employees dramatically losing buying power as the cost-of-living increases, has led to a recruitment and retaining crisis. Stagnant wages imperil services.

All across the state from hospitals to prisons to social services to state highway administration talented, valuable people are leaving for better paying jobs, often with the counties or with the federal government, and state positions are left unfilled.

The work that state employees do is skilled and difficult. Just like any employer, the state of Maryland refusing to keep pace with the cost of living is damaging their abilities to attract and retain talented employees and severely damaging the services that the state provides.

GOV. HOGAN'S STATE GOVERNMENT IS THE WAL-MART OF MARYLAND

Even though Maryland is one of the richest states in the nation, a significant percentage of state employees are below the poverty line. Many are eligible for social service benefits. The state of Maryland should work to alleviate poverty, not contribute to it.

Public service has been a path into the middle class for groups that are marginalized in the private sector, women and people of color. The denial of wages to state employees has a disproportionate impact on these groups and have led to a significant percentage of state employees slipping out of the middle class.

Even during the pandemic, the Maryland economy has thrived. Tax revenues are up, and still, Gov. Hogan has given the most raises to law enforcement officers disproportionately leaving behind black workers and female workers who represent the majority of frontline state employees. Maryland state employees deserve better.

Solutions to Maryland's Stagnant Wage Problem



BINDING ARBITRATION

When Maryland state employees and management engage in bargaining, the hope is common ground and agreement can be reached. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and there is no resolution available if an impasse happens. Binding arbitration is a process where a neutral third party, agreed to by both labor and management, listens to proposals from both sides and decides what a fair agreement would look like. This is not an unusual arrangement: the Maryland Transit Administration has binding arbitration, as well as eight county and local governments in Maryland. The ability to bring a resolution to the bargaining process is good for both labor and management.

OVERRIDE GOV. HOGAN'S VETO OF SB 9 (2021)

Currently, every campus negotiates separate personnel agreements. These are often heavily influenced by general USM guidance but are different and inconsistent across campuses. This process is expensive, inefficient, and unfair. This has been a problem historically as working conditions and wages fluctuate across the USM campuses, but it's been even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic with each campus pursuing their own policy on health and safety—and often poorly. SB 9 requires that the USM negotiate a master agreement with AFSCME that standardizes and improves the wages, benefits, and working conditions for all our members across the USM schools. Governor Hogan vetoed SB9 and we urge the General Assembly override his veto immediately when they convene again.

EXPAND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

There are state agencies that have been left out of collective bargaining. In the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) for instance, employees there are state employees just like their peers in other agencies, but they've been excluded from being able to collectively bargain. This causes varying salaries across the state's executive branch agencies and in some case, they even compete for staff. When workers can collectively bargain, salaries increase, and they have more of a voice. Maryland should expand collective bargaining for OPD and other state employees who have been excluded.

SUPPORT ANNUAL STEPS AND COLAS

For decades, the staffing levels of the state were preserved through the best possible retention program: annual step increases. As enshrined in state law, these steps were automatically authorized year-by-year by governors of both parties; they were only withheld from employees who had received unsatisfactory performance evaluations. As a result, the state of Maryland had the staff on hand to fulfill its obligations to Marylanders without having to constantly revise hiring wages or resort to contracting out work with less-qualified contracting companies.

This system has completely broken down with the Hogan administration approving one step increase in the last eight years. State employees are easily a decade behind in their steps and as a result, wage compression and the lure of higher-paying jobs with regular wages has decimated state employment.

STAND WITH AFSCME COUNCIL 3

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AFSCME Council 3 represents over 30,000 hardworking and dedicated employees in Maryland State government and in our public higher education institutions. We are the state's largest and fastest-growing union for public service employees. We Make Maryland Happen.

OUR LOCALS

- Local 112** | MD Dept of Social Services
- Local 174** | MD State Aviation Administration
- Local 239** | Frostburg State University Employees
- Local 266** | Spring Grove/RICA Catonsville Employees
- Local 354** | Washington and Frederick County, State Employees
- Local 423** | Office of the Public Defender
- Local 539** | Carroll & Howard County State Employees
- Local 557** | Clifton T. Perkins Hospital
- Local 611** | Thomas B. Finan Center - Garrett & Allegany County Employees
- Local 631** | Suburban Washington Employees
- Local 669** | Western MD State Highway
- Local 770** | Upper Eastern Shore Employees
- Local 898** | Western Correctional Institution Employees
- Local 1072** | University of Maryland College Park Employees
- Local 1081** | Eastern Shore Employees
- Local 1107** | MDTA, Perryville
- Local 1138** | MDTA, Annapolis
- Local 1297** | Bowie State University Employees
- Local 1319** | Patuxent Institution Employees
- Local 1356** | Coppin State University Employees
- Local 1427** | Baltimore City Correctional Institutions Employees
- Local 1459** | Univ. of Maryland Baltimore County Employees
- Local 1535** | Maryland State Employees, Baltimore City
- Local 1606** | MDTA, Baltimore City
- Local 1678** | Jessup Correctional Institutions
- Local 1772** | Hagerstown Correctional Institutions
- Local 1803** | MD Employees in Anne Arundel County
- Local 1833** | University of Maryland E. Shore
- Local 1839** | Univ. of Maryland - Baltimore, Employees
- Local 1867** | Amalgamated State Workers (Baltimore, Harford & Cecil Counties)
- Local 1870** | Baltimore City Community College Employees
- Local 1885** | Morgan State University Employees
- Local 2801** | Maryland Port Authority Employees
- Local 3167** | Department of Juvenile Services
- Local 3478** | Eastern Correctional Institute
- Local 3641** | Department of Labor
- Local 3644** | Dept. of Education Employees, IWIF/ Worker's Comp Employees
- Local 3655** | MVA/MD. Insurance Administration
- Local 3661** | Parole and Probation Employees
- Local 3674** | MD State Court Employees & Register of Wills
- Local 3675** | MD State Police Civilian Employees
- Local 3895** | University of Baltimore
- Local 3980** | St. Marys College of Maryland Employees

AFSCME Council 3 President Patrick Moran

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