

APRIL 8TH, 2021

AFSCME 3 NEWSLETTER

Legislative Update: Almost Near the End of Session 2021

We are less than a week from completing the General Assembly's 2021 90-Day legislative session. Here are some of the latest actions taken by the legislature that AFSCME Council 3 has been advocating. We are proud to announce our legislation to consolidate collective bargaining for our higher education institutions within the University System of Maryland (SB 09) has passed both the Senate and House! Next stop: Governor's Desk. Congratulations to members in higher education for this important step forward!

- **HB 73** would establish an Office of Telework Assistance to develop and post best practices for telework policies and to assist businesses with implementing telework policies, including awarding grants to businesses to help cover hardware and software purchases. HB 73 also requires local governments to establish telework policies to reinforce what many are already doing. In state government, HB 73 requires public higher education institutions and each of the three branches of government to establish telework policies. Where employees in the State are covered by collective bargaining, these policies must be negotiated beginning in Fiscal Year 2023. It has passed the House of Delegates and will receive a bill hearing in Senate Finance Tuesday, April 6.
- **HB 97, The Digital Connectivity Act of 2021**, would establish an Office of Digital Inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that every resident of the State is supported by high-quality, affordable broadband Internet service and has the tools necessary to take advantage of the Internet. It would also require the Office to develop, by July 1, 2022, a statewide plan to ensure that all State residents have the ability to connect to reliable broadband Internet by December 31, 2026, and establish a Digital Inclusion Fund to support capacity building in the State. The bill has passed the Senate 47-0 and the House 115-19 and now awaits presentation to the Governor.
- **The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act (MEWPA-HB 581/SB 486)** would provide for consistent policies regarding safe and hygienic worksites, emergency pandemic plans, paid pandemic leave, and the timely notification of positive cases at worksites. It passed the House of Delegates 93-39 and is awaiting action in the Senate.
- **SB 642 (Sen. Elfreth) and HB 922 (Del. Lierman)** which would clarify the eligibility of members of the State Retirement and Pension System for "line-of-duty" death benefits when COVID-19 caused or contributed to the death of a member, passed both chambers, 45-0 in the Senate and 136-0 in the House and now awaits presentation to the Governor.
- **Juneteenth** is a holiday celebrating the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in the United States. Originating in Galveston, Texas, it is now celebrated annually on the 19th of June throughout the United States, with varying official recognition. It is commemorated on the anniversary date of the June 19, 1865 announcement by Union Army general Gordon Granger, proclaiming freedom from slavery in Texas. **HB 448** would designate June 19 as Juneteenth National Freedom Day as a State legal and employee holiday. It has passed the House of Delegates 112-24 and is awaiting action in the Senate.

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE: WWW.AFSCMEMD.ORG

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MDTA & MES State Employee Secure Bonus: When We Fight, We Win

As most State employees were guaranteed the \$1,000 bonus, employees of Maryland Environmental Services (MES) and Maryland Transportation Authority (MdTA) were not. MdTA and MES are agencies controlled by boards of directors, not the Governor.

After pressure and lobbying by AFSCME and legislators we work with, the boards of both agencies APPROVED the \$1,000 bonus on March 25th. The MdTA board was especially resistant to giving our member the bonus but after over an hour of discussion they finally relented. We won these raises by fighting and organizing. We need everyone to join our struggle to ensure fair treatment, fair pay, and to get what we deserve.



You DESERVE this April Bonus and more! Join the Fight

AFSCME members are fighting for more than this bonus. AFSCME members will be getting a long overdue acknowledgement of their sacrifices during the pandemic in the form of a \$1000 bonus on April 14th for state employees and April 21st for higher education employees. This \$1000 bonus will be taxed but is still an important step forward compared to the significant and permanent pay cuts Governor Hogan has tried to enforce over the past year.

In July, before the economic reality was clear, Governor Hogan tried to propose a permanent 5% pay cut in addition to cuts to positions and increasing the cost of health insurance. AFSCME members organized together and urged the Board of Public Works to vote no on these cuts. Even as the economic picture in Maryland showed our state's economy was surviving during the fall, the Governor continued to propose furloughs up until December.

Our union stood strong and rejected the Governor's cuts all last year. Now, he has found money for a bonus. We will not stop fighting for the raises we deserve and that includes more than this bonus! The long-term sacrifices of our members before and after the pandemic can't be disregarded.

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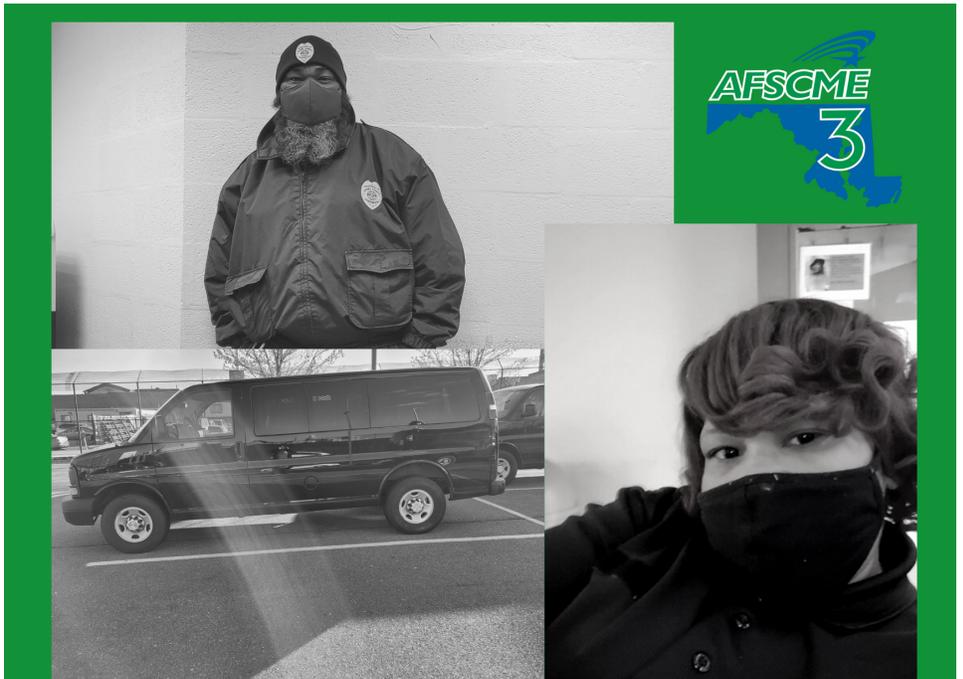
Emergency Pay Grievance

Update: April 2021

Since the beginning of the pandemic, AFSCME members have made it clear that DBM's response pay was a violation of our contract language on emergency pay. In response, we filed the largest group grievance against the State of Maryland to enforce our contract and are in the final step of the grievance procedure. The recent announcement about COVID-19 backpay (the \$3.13/hr for limited classifications) does not impact our case and just underscores the pressure the Governor and his administration feel to properly compensate public employees.

The Emergency Pay Grievance has been stalled at the final step of the grievance procedure for several months. First, because the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) took several months to process the case through their office due to understaffing and the number of participants in the grievance. Now, despite agreement from the union and DBM on how the case should be heard, OAH has insisted on a different format, undoubtedly prolonging the case as we now must fight to return to the format mutually agreed upon previously.

Our goal remains clear: to enforce our contract language and ensure AFSCME members were fairly compensated for their response during an emergency. Despite the legal obstacles presented by the Office of Administrative Hearings, this case will be heard. We will continue to work closely with our legal team to ensure it is heard in the fairest way possible and update you as we get news. Unfortunately, the grievance procedure is a slow path but we will continue to fight for fair pay and safe working conditions in every venue possible- at the worksites, in Annapolis, with management- to enforce our contract and our rights.



We are proud to be Afscmc members just as we are proud to be transportation officers and serving the state of Maryland!

Transportation Officers work hard to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are distributed across the State to protect frontline workers.

DENISE HENDERSON, PRESIDENT, AFSCME LOCAL 3167