



# Week In Action Newsletter

May 8, 2020

Read the full newsletter with links and more content on [VSEA.org](http://VSEA.org)



This year more than ever, VSEA is thanking and acknowledging the dedication and courage of each and every Vermont state employee during Public Service Recognition Week 2020, which is celebrated nationally the first week of May to honor the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees. Your service to Vermont and Vermonters is appreciated.

## VSEA & State Agree To Extend COVID-19 Agreement Thru May 23 For Three Executive Branch Units

The State and VSEA's Executive Branch Bargaining Units agreed this week to extend the terms of the current COVID-19 pandemic agreement for an additional pay period. The current agreement, that was set to expire on May 9, will remain in effect until Saturday, May 23, 2020.

The three VSEA Units receiving the extension are Non-Management, Corrections and Supervisory.

Here's an excerpt from a DHR email this week about the agreement:

This email is to notify you that the paid leave effective April 6 provided by the State of Vermont for employees who are unable to work, or telework, for reasons arising from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, has been extended to May 23. It remains a requirement that any employee who is able to work is expected to do so.

Guidance provided on April 10, regarding how to request the paid leave, required documentation, applicable forms, time coding instructions and FAQs remains in effect. When requesting Emergency Paid Sick Leave or Expanded Family and Medical Leave, you must submit a SOV FFCRA Leave Request form. Please note that each qualifying reason requires additional documentation. All of this supportive information, as well as the documents and forms, can be found on the COVID-19 resource page of the DHR website.

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If you have any additional questions, or are experiencing a circumstance related to COVID-19 please contact your Human Resources Rep for further assistance.

## **Judiciary, DG & VSHA Units Will Mirror Executive Branch Agreement**

VSEA's Judiciary, Defender General, and State Housing Authority Units have reached an agreement to extended their COVID-19 leave agreement for another two weeks, to May 23. The agreements extend not only the leave but also the hazard pay for those who qualify, just like in the Executive Branch agreement. News on what members of VSEA's State Colleges Units will be doing should be coming very soon.

## **VSEA Election Update: Board Approves Online Petition-Signature Gathering For Interested Candidate**

The VSEA Board of Trustees met this week to discuss a number of different topics, including how to resolve an issue around how members interested in running for a Board seat this year can collect required petition signatures in the age of COVID-19.

Here are the options the Board approved:

- **If safely able**, a member-candidate can still collect 25 physical petition signatures from VSEA full-fledged members; or
- Participate in a modified petition process to allowing member-candidates to submit their interest in running for a Board seat to VSEA, via email, by June 1, 2020. The firm, Simply Voting, will then send out an electronic petition to all VSEA members. The electronic petition will list the names of all the candidates who submitted a request or self-nomination electronically. In order to qualify for the ballot, the member-candidate must receive at least 25 "votes" / electronic signatures from full-fledged members on his or her petition. An

official ballot will then be sent to members who belong to the specific Unit or Chapter where there's a race. The candidate who gets the most votes wins. **Again, the deadline for members to send an email to [vsea@vsea.org](mailto:vsea@vsea.org), stating your desire to have your name placed on an electronic petition, is June 1.**

Here again are the Board seats up for election. If you are able to safely gather signatures from your colleagues, each Board seat mentioned below links to PDF petitions:

- Supervisory (three-year seat)
- Corrections (three-year seat)
- VSHA/DG (three-year seat)
- District 4 - Franklin / Grand Isle / Chittenden / Addison (three-year seat)

If you have a question about your eligibility, please email VSEA Organizing Director Amy Kinsell at [akinsell@vsea.org](mailto:akinsell@vsea.org).

## **Campaign To Save Vermont's State Colleges Continues!**

### **Keep The Heat On!**

VSEA, the AFT and other unions are continuing to urge members and retirees to participate in the next step in a collective campaign to save Vermont's state colleges, which is to call and email your lawmakers and the Governor with this message:

**"Please provide bridge funding to the Vermont State Colleges to keep them all open and operating."**

Find State Lawmakers' Contact information and the Governor's Office Contact information on [VSEA.org](http://VSEA.org)

Equally important, after you send the message, please reach out to anyone you might know who is fighting

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along with VSEA to prevent these closures to ask them to send the same message to their lawmakers and the Governor. Please share social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and messages on your profiles to help get the word out. If you are on Facebook please join this group. Post messages of support for Vermont's colleges on Front Porch Forum. Lastly, if you have not already, sign the growing online petition that now has over 47,000 signatures.

Thanks in advance for your help. We are all in this fight together and if we keep the pressure on we will succeed in securing a bright future for all of our VSC campuses.

## **House Speaker Creates "Idea Bank" To Gather Ideas To Save VSC System**

The introduction paragraph of the online page where House Speaker Mitzi Johnson is posting the ideas submitted:

The Office of the Speaker is hosting an "Idea Bank" for the future of the Vermont State College System. This effort leverages the collective knowledge and creativity of Vermonters while providing a database to organize submitted ideas. Those that have been submitted, thus far, have been organized into broad categories, which will be continually updated as feedback is received. If you would like to contribute your own thoughts to the Idea Bank, please email them to your Vermont State Representative.

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## **Local Bennington Company Prints Face Shields For Vets' Home Workers**

Hearing the calls from workers at the Vermont Veterans' Home (VVH) for more personal protective equipment, the Bennington Banner reports this week that local Bennington firm Abacus Automation has begun 3D printing face shields for the VVH employees.

Mike Lynch, an engineer with Abacus, which builds customized automation equipment for manufacturers, explains that his time and effort printing the shields is worth it, "especially for the vets." He adds that he will continue to print additional shields for the VVH workers.

VVH's chief operating officer and deputy administrator, Al Faxon, said the VVH is grateful for the donated shields, explaining how they will be worn by staff over their masks when interacting with residents suffering from certain respiratory ailments, including the flu.

## **National Nurses Day 2020 Thank You!**

VSEA sent special thanks on Tuesday to all nurses, in Vermont and across America, working on the frontlines of the coronavirus pandemic, reminding them that their service, dedication and courage is appreciated.

The post ended with, "Thank you nurses for all you do, not only during a pandemic, but every day!"

## **Corrections Officers Week 2020 - Thank You!**

VSEA is sending special thanks this week to all Vermont corrections officers and employees, most of whom are doing their part--and more--to keep inmates, themselves and Vermonters safe during this coronavirus pandemic. Your service, dedication and courage is appreciated.



## AFLAC Insurance Enrollment: Sign Up Through VSEA!

*WIA was asked by VSEA Benefits Administrator, Joanne Woodcock, to include the following in this week's newsletter:*

Dear Friends,

During these uncertain times, it has never been more important than now to protect your income.

Did you know that as a VSEA member, you are eligible for guaranteed issued disability with AFLAC through the convenience of payroll deduction! The State does not offer short term disability insurance other than accrued sick time.

If you would like to discuss this valuable VSEA member benefit in more detail, please call me.

I will call you on the day and time you select. Please be in front of a computer at the time of your appointment.

There are many advantages to VSEA membership. Please check them out at [www.vsea.org](http://www.vsea.org).

Thank you and I hope you stay well and safe.

Best regards,  
Joanne

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## VSEA's Spring Membership Drive!

### Recruit Members, Win Prizes!

After a very successful membership-recruitment initiative this past winter, VSEA is excited to announce a new membership drive for the next quarter!

Never forget that ongoing recruitment is vital to the strength of your union!

- Members who recruit **TWO** members will receive a **VSEA insulated travel mug**;
- Members who recruit **FIVE** new members will receive a **dues holiday for a month**; and
- Members who recruit **TEN** new members will receive a check for **\$50!**

Every time you recruit a new member between now and May 31, your name is entered into a drawing. **Four names will be pulled at random and winners will receive a check for \$100!**

Just be sure your recruits include your name in the "Recruited by" section of the VSEA Membership Application.

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

**"We are committed to ensuring that educational opportunities are available at all Vermont State College campuses in the fall."**

Line from a joint statement released this week by Senate Pro Tem Tim Ashe and House Speaker Mitzi Johnson, regarding fall opportunities at the Vermont State Colleges.



## TALKING POINTS:

### VT UPS Worker Fired For Raising Safety Concerns Is Back At Work

UPS Puts On The Blinders & Demands Employee's Reinstatement Hinge On Her Apology To Company

Last week, WIA shared a *VTDigger* story about UPS employee Marge Harvey, who was fired on April 10 "after raising COVID-19 safety concerns at the facility in St. Johnsbury where she worked." This week, *VTDigger* is reporting that, thanks largely to the support and activism of her co-workers, Harvey is returning to work, albeit with a directive that she apologize to UPS, which she did--reluctantly.

"I had to say it," Harvey says of her apology. Asked what she was told she had to apologize for, Harvey replied, "For all the trouble I caused the company."

More from the *VTDigger* story:

*Harvey said she hasn't had problems with her supervisors since returning to work.*

*"The management has not been harsh on me at all," she said, adding that everyone at the facility has been busy with the increase in deliveries stemming from online ordering as many retail operations have had to curtail in-store shopping due to the coronavirus.*

*She did say that the facility also now has "plenty" of hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies.*

*"But they still slack on enforcement of the policies," Harvey said. "Many people are not wearing face masks, they are not doing social distancing."*

*She said she does her best to stay a safe distance away from other employees at work. "Each person has to be responsible for their own safety, the company is only going to do so much," Harvey said.*

*She said since her return to work she has heard many kind words from customers, including a sign that was posted outside The Timeout Tavern Sports Bar & Grille in Canaan that read, "Welcome back Marge! We missed you."*

### National AFSCME Purchasing \$1 Million Ad Buy To Convince Congress To Send Relief Money To States

*Politico* posted this week that the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is preparing to spend more than \$1 million on a campaign to urge Congress to supply more money to states and cities in its next relief package. The group may also increase the buy later.

The AFSCME ad buy will run in Florida, Utah, the District of Columbia, Maine, North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, Colorado, Alaska, Florida, Ohio and Montana. There are competitive Senate races in Maine, North Carolina, Colorado and Montana.

The ads will be split between two spots. In one, front-line workers explain the working conditions they are facing and a narrator asks Congress to fund "state and local aid now." The other ad says a "public service army" will be needed to beat coronavirus.

"Don't let Congress fire the front-line workers who can save us," the second ad says.

AFT Site: "Write a Letter" To Congress On This Issue

*Note: VSEA members will want to support his bill and participate in this action to ensure Vermont gets some federal money to prevent future cuts to state services and workers, dues to a projected huge deficit, primarily caused by the fight against coronavirus.*

### Coronavirus Crisis Spurring Increased Union Activism

*The Guardian* reports this week that the coronavirus crisis is causing a surge in union activism nationwide.

From the story:

In recent weeks, there has been an extraordinary surge of anger and activism nationwide as workers have protested what they consider inadequate safety protections against Covid-19: at meatpacking plants, McDonald's restaurants, Amazon warehouses, bus depots and grocery stores. Labor leaders applaud the

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walkouts and sickouts, and many of them are asking whether this spike in activism can be converted long-term into increased organizing and unionization and somehow reverse labor's decades-long slide.

The answer depends in part on how vigorously unions and other worker groups respond, but also on how successfully America's many anti-union corporations respond in quelling this new militancy and any push for unionization. Some prominent companies have responded aggressively – Amazon has fired four outspoken worker leaders, including the leader of a walkout at its Staten Island warehouse, while Trader Joe's CEO sent an anti-union letter to all employees.

## **Getting Ready To Retire? Retired Already? Join The VSEA Retired Members' Chapter!**

Long-time VSEA activist and leader Terry Lefebvre is asking VSEA members getting ready to retire to join the VSEA Retirees' Chapter to continue to be an active and engaged union member, even in retirement. Lefebvre also appeals to VSEA members to talk up the co-workers they know who might be preparing to retire. If you already belong to the Retired Members' Chapter, a big thanks to you.

Learn more about the VSEA Retired Members' Chapter by calling 802-223-5247 or emailing [VSEARetirees@gmail.com](mailto:VSEARetirees@gmail.com). You can also log onto [www.vsea.org/retirees](http://www.vsea.org/retirees)

## **NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR:**

**Due to coronavirus, all VSEA meetings are canceled until further notice.**

Please note: VSEA HQ (155 State Street, Montpelier) is closed due to COVID-19 concerns. VSEA staff is working remotely. If you have questions, please call 802-223-5247 or email [vsea@vsea.org](mailto:vsea@vsea.org).



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