



Week In Action Newsletter

March 20, 2020

Read the full newsletter with links and more content on VSEA.org

THANK YOU

*to all the workers on the front lines
of the coronavirus crisis*



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VSEA Secures Paid Leave Time For Employees Displaced By Coronavirus

For the second time in as many weeks, VSEA leaders and staff met with Administration representatives on March 16 to be updated on the status of the coronavirus threat, what is being done to protect front-line employees and the public and what moves the State is planning to combat it. One major development to come out of Monday's meeting was an agreement by the State to grant paid leave to state employees who are "unable to work for reasons arising from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic."

From a March 17 Department of Human Resources memo about the agreement reached between VSEA Bargaining Teams and the State:

*While any employee who is able work will be expected to do so, employees unable to work due to self-isolation, COVID-19 related illness and the closure of schools/daycares will continue to be paid. **The new COVID-19 paid leave created by this tentative agreement will be available for employees' use beginning Wednesday, March 18 through the close of business on April 5, 2020.** This will alleviate concerns for those employees who don't have sufficient leave time, and provide a bridge to get us through the next few weeks while we get a fuller picture of any upcoming congressional action, work through unemployment insurance issues, and understand how we can provide impacted Vermonters a safety net. VSEA members and retirees who want to hear more about VSEA's Monday meeting with the State are invited to watch a short video that features VSEA First VP Aimee Towne, talking about what went down.*

> *Watch Video 1: VSEA & State's Agreement Explained on VSEA.org!*

VP Towne also recorded a short video that posted to VSEA's Facebook page this morning. In it, she answers some of the contract and work-related questions VSEA

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members have been asking about the coronavirus threat.

> *Watch Video 2: Your Coronavirus Questions on VSEA.org!*

VSEA Sends Letter To Governor

VSEA members should also take a few minutes to read a letter VSEA President Dave Bellini sent to the Governor last Saturday afternoon. In it, Bellini spells out the actions VSEA wants the State to take right now to protect frontline employees and the public from coronavirus. You can also read the State's response to Bellini's letter, which, unfortunately, is light on details.

VSEA Posts Coronavirus Webpage

VSEA is trying its best to keep up with all the moving pieces of the coronavirus threat, and we want to keep you informed. A webpage has been created to post all the latest updates your union can provide. A link to this page can also be found on the VSEA.org homepage.

This page will be updated probably daily for a while, unfortunately, so check it regularly, as well as VSEA's social media sites.

If you have a specific question(s), related to the outbreak, please contact your VSEA Union Representative or send an email to vsea@vsea.org.

Additional Resource: Vermont Department of Health's Coronavirus Webpage

State Offers Child Care To "Essential Employees"

The State announced yesterday that "essential employees" who need child care to fight the coronavirus outbreak can now call these numbers for assistance:

Call 211 ext. 6, or 1-877-705-9008

The State's list of who is "essential" is being updated frequently as this situation evolves.

View Latest List Of "Essential Employees" on [VSEA.org](https://vsea.org)

Keep The Updates Coming!

Since WIA first requested members to email what you're receiving and hearing about your department or agency's response to the coronavirus, dozens of responses have been emailed, and the input has been (and will continue to be) very, very helpful. Keep them coming.

Members are asked to send an email to vsea@vsea.org and write "Corona Response" in the subject line,

Posters!

The Vermont Department of Health, in coordination with federal agencies, recently published a set of posters that VSEA is recommending members print out to hang on your VSEA worksite bulletin board. You can view and/or download the posters online at [VSEA.org](https://vsea.org).

Revamped VSEA Website Goes Live Next Week!

Note: Well, there were unanticipated hiccups this week that delayed the activation of VSEA's overhauled website. Apologies. Re-running last week's post, as it still makes sense.

VSEA's Communications Department is pleased to report that some long-overdue maintenance on your union's website is finally nearing completion. The site is expected to live early next week, pending any last-minute hiccups.

"Members, retirees and visitors to the revamped site will notice it has a slightly different look and that the site's functionality is improved, especially on mobile devices," says VSEA Communications Specialist Kris Lizzari. "There will still be some fine-tuning to do, but we're happy with how the new site turned out." He adds that members will be able to register for new accounts when the site goes live next week.

Members and retirees experiencing issues with the VSEA website, once it is live, should contact the VSEA Communications Department. Please also share any corrections to posted information you may discover.



Reminder! March 31 Is The Deadline To Submit VSEA Bylaw Changes

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA's Master Bylaws is **Tuesday, March 31, 2020**. Proposals must be mailed to: Tim Belcher, General Counsel, c/o VSEA Headquarters, 155 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.

Proposals should reference the number, section, sub-section, etc. of the bylaw you would like to change. You should also include the language you want to add, delete or substitute. Also include the reason(s) you are making this proposal. Example: "Bylaw O A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar."

Please be sure the changes you are recommending include all Articles and/or Bylaws that may be affected by the proposed change. If you have questions, please contact Tim by email at tbelcher@vsea.org. State officials testified this week that none of the four "Request for Proposal" bids submitted recently by private firms to replace Woodside's services were found to be satisfactory. Alarming, this leaves the state of Vermont without a backfill for the Woodside facility, which the Administration wants to close on July 1. This is a scary thought. Vermont's at-risk youth deserve the best care our state can provide and, until a true replacement for Woodside can be found, how can Vermonters, in good conscious, allow Woodside to be shuttered?

In other developments, it does sound like the State is prepared to send at-risk youth charged with an adult crime to the Marble Valley Correctional Facility in Rutland.

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING!

Friday, May 29

Castleton University

Castelton, VT

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Mark The Date!

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.

We Are Stronger When We Stick Together!

Need a quick reference to help with your recruiting? You can view an informational webpage with some recruitment tips and advice on VSEA.org. You can also request a link by emailing vsea@vsea.org.

If you have any questions or want a list of non-members in your area, please contact VSEA Director of Operations and Organizing Amy Kinsell by email: akinsell@vsea.org



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TALKING POINTS:

NY Public Employees Sign Temporary, Emergency Agreement With Cuomo Administration, Governing Telecommuting

The NY Public Employees Federation (PEF) put out a short statement this week after it leaders signed a temporary, emergency agreement with the Cuomo administration, governing telecommuting for employees during the coronavirus crisis.

From the statement:

After days of cautious negotiations, we have come to terms on a temporary, emergency agreement with the State for telecommuting during this time of crisis. This program is an attempt to strike a balance between ensuring New York State can continue to function, while providing appropriate precautions for PEF members to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This agreement shows how much we can accomplish quickly when we work together, and want to thank Governor Cuomo and his team for the leadership displayed in working with us to protect our members and all New Yorkers.

First and foremost, this is an emergency, temporary agreement for up to 60 days. The program can be extended upon agreement by both the State and PEF.

This is an alternate work arrangement that allows some of our membership to conduct all or some of their work at home. State operations must continue but telecommuting will be approved to the greatest extent possible. This will relieve some of the stressful situations of those that must use mass transit, enter areas of population density and/or deal with the issues of closing schools or daycare. It will also allow for social distancing.

Telecommuting under this agreement may be up to five days per week, whereas under our current contract, it is limited to four days per pay period.

Please note that although we requested that all members be allowed to telecommute, each agency has the full discretion to deploy their workforce and

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"Should the outbreak of COVID-19 grow significantly in Vermont, as is expected, we call on the [State] to declare an emergency closing of state government in order to protect state employees, their families and the public they serve."

Line from a letter VSEA President Dave Bellini sent to the Governor last Saturday, outlining union members' coronavirus concerns and requesting worker and public protections for the tough days, weeks or even months that lie ahead.

each application must be approved by supervisors and human resources.

We made sure to include protections for our members by negotiating built-in appeal processes for both mandatory and voluntary portions of the temporary agreement. We asked for and received a training, which occurs prior to the actual telecommuting. This is another step that protects our members.

Telecommuters/members using personal devices will receive instruction on how to obtain VDI, VPN and/or an RSA token. These must be tested before telecommuting can begin. This is an agreement that not only protects our members but allows those members to continue to provide services during this emergency.

Finally, this program will take effect immediately for a period of sixty days upon signature of the State and PEF. It can be extended upon agreement by both parties. This Pilot Program can be cancelled by the State in its sole discretion with one-week advance written notice to PEF.



Vermont Ranks 9th In Nation In Terms Of how Aggressively State Is Responding To Coronavirus

US News & World Report posted a story this week that ranks U.S. states by how aggressively each has responded to the coronavirus. Here are the nation's top 10, as of March 16:

1. Rhode Island
2. Connecticut
3. Maryland
4. New York
5. Washington
6. Massachusetts
7. New Jersey
8. Minnesota
- 9. Vermont**
10. District of Columbia

The post also lists the nation's worst states when it comes to a response to the coronavirus to date.

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. You can also log onto www.vsea.org/retirees

2020 VSEA Scholarship Application Available Now!

The VSEA Awards/ Scholarship Committee is currently soliciting applications from students seeking financial assistance in the pursuit of post-secondary educational goals.

The Committee will announce the recipients of the scholarships at the June Council Meeting.

View/download the 2020 VSEA Scholarship Application on VSEA.org or request a copy by emailing vsea@vsea.org.

Deadline: 4:30 p.m. on May 8, 2020

NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR:

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

March 25 Waterbury Chapter Meeting is cancelled!

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.



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