

# WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 28, 2014 – May 2, 2014

## VSEA Issues Take Center Stage At May Day Event

On Thursday, May 1, VSEA members joined with hundreds of other working Vermonters to celebrate May Day with a spirited rally at the State House followed by a rollicking parade through downtown Montpelier. This year's event took on new significance for VSEA members, as two of the day's primary focuses were the union's anti-retaliation campaign and the current fight by VSEA Judiciary members for a fair contract.

One of the day's first speakers was VSEA President Shelley Martin, and here is an excerpt from her remarks:

*"The VSEA family is more than 6,000 state workers across Vermont, and over the last couple of years our union's direction is changing and our strength is growing. VSEA's new focus on worker empowerment has helped our members come together recently to win not only hard-fought battles at the bargaining table but also critical fights at the State House and at our worksites. However, VSEA members' new activism has meant a change in many frontline workers' attitudes and you may have read or heard lately that some State managers are not dealing so well with all this empowerment and change. In fact, a big reason VSEA members are here today is because our rights are being trampled by some managers who are now retaliating against our members for being union leaders and for daring to speak the truth to lawmakers. This is not only wrong, it's unlawful and it's a betrayal of our members' basic rights!"*

and

*"Today, as we pass the Vermont Supreme Court here on my left, some of our members from the VSEA Judiciary Bargaining Team will be leading chants to management in that building, demanding that they bargain a fair contract for hundreds of frontline Vermont Judiciary workers. These workers are in the heat of tense negotiations right now and your solidarity is appreciated."*

As part of the May Day march's VSEA issue emphasis, marchers made a hard left off State Street and surrounded the Department of Human Resources' main office at 110 State Street, loudly chanting "DHR isn't fair, workers' rights are everywhere." Marchers then crossed back over State Street to support VSEA Judiciary workers, chanting "What do we want? Fair contract. When do we want it? Now!" while filing past the Vermont Supreme Court building.

### Justice for John Howe

In a strong demonstration of support, dozens of marchers and protestors carried "We Are All John Howe: Stop Retaliation Against Whistleblowers" placards with them yesterday, and many more wore stickers with similar messages. Howe, who attended May Day to participate, said he was touched by the outpouring of support for his campaign for justice and he vowed to continue fighting to clear his name and reputation, reminding again that his fight is not just for him, but for all state employees who speak out. A flyer explaining Howe's fight was also distributed throughout the crowd.

If you would like to view photos from the 2014 May Day march and rally, please [click here](#).

A short VSEA video from the event will post soon as well on [www.vsea.org](http://www.vsea.org) and on the VSEA and Justice for John Howe Facebook pages.

## **State, VSEA & Lawmakers Backs Pilot Project To Allow Departments & Agencies To Staff To Budget**

Currently, the number of positions each agency and department is allocated in a given budget year is dictated by the Legislature. That's not always the best way to manage personnel, which is why VSEA is applauding State leaders' efforts to convince lawmakers to include a pilot staffing program for certain agencies and departments in the FY2015 budget.

The pilot program will, for the first time ever, allow managers in certain departments and agencies to bypass legislative approval and add new positions as needed, within existing budgets. Included in the pilot program are the Department of Public Service, the Agency of Transportation, the Department for Children and Families, the Department for Environmental Conservation and Buildings and General Services. In testimony last week to the Senate Government Operations Committee, Secretary of the Administration Jeb Spaulding explained that the State chose departments and agencies that are currently using large numbers of temporary employees or overtime, as well as ones that are receiving funding from multiple sources.

"The goal of this pilot program is to provide smarter and better performing government at less cost," Spaulding told the explained to the Committee, which did end up voting to approve the pilot program. He stressed that the State does not want to continue "fixating on the number of employees" but rather on "finding new ways to reduce agency and department use of overtime, temporary workers and private contractors."

"We pick out a handful of departments, give them certain criteria and reporting requirements, and say we're going to give you the flexibility to work with what you see as an appropriate number of employees—as long as it stays within the existing budget," Spaulding continued. "We're hoping to be able to show that we can more effectively manage our workload and expenditures in a way that may require an increase in the number of employees but will deliver the necessary programs and services in a more efficient, higher quality and less expensive fashion."

Department of Human Resources' Commissioner Kate Duffy echoed Spaulding's support in her testimony, telling the Committee, "Right now, the only authority DHR has is we can sweep vacant positions into a position pool and then dole out certain positions based on requests from agencies and departments. But we don't think DHR is the best one to be managing what positions, say, an AOT manager might need. It's a hard thing for us to know. We feel that business managers and financial folks in each of the agencies and departments are the ones who know best what they need. DHR is not necessarily going to be able to articulate what the folks at AOT want, but AOT managers know what they need and that there are only X number of positions available."

Lawmakers are requiring the State to file annual updates on the pilot program's successes and failures, and the right to amend the list of participating agencies and departments at any time. The program is scheduled to sunset in 2019, unless otherwise extended or modified by lawmakers.

## **VSEA Judiciary Unit Chair Discusses New Approach To Bargaining On Equal Time Radio**

### **VSEA Union Representative Also Discusses His ULP**

VSEA Judiciary Unit Chair Margaret Crowley appeared on WDEV's Equal Time Radio on April 29 and did a fantastic job educating host Traven Leyshon and his listening audience about the service these workers provide and the way they are changing their approach to current bargaining. Crowley explains that, in the past, because these workers are spread out so far and wide across Vermont, it made it very difficult to facilitate meaningful and necessary member-to-member communication, especially during bargaining, when members really need to be talking to one another. She details how this year's bargaining has been different, as Judiciary leaders are making a concerted effort to stay in regular communication with all Unit members to keep them abreast of developments and possible worker activism. But as Crowley explains, some Judiciary managers are still used to the old ways and are actively working to shut down the new level of member-to-member interaction and information sharing. To illustrate her point, VSEA Union Representative Brian Morse joined Crowley on the show and described what happened to him recently in Lamoille County when he tried to introduce himself to VSEA members working at the courthouse. Morse describes how he was followed around and monitored by management throughout his visit, which had a chilling effect on his discussions with employees. VSEA has since filed an unfair labor practice on behalf of Morse, and he talks about the ULP on the show.

To listen to a podcast of the Equal Time interview with Crowley and Morse, please [click here](#).

## **VSEA Alerting DAIL Members To Public Hearings**

VSEA is urging you to please attend a series of upcoming public hearings concerning a draft "Vermont State System of Care Plan for Developmental Disabilities Service" document for fiscal years 2015-2017.

Because you are the experts on the frontlines, your input is essential to help develop the best plan possible to serve Vermonters with developmental disabilities. Meeting times and places are listed below. In advance of the meetings, please take some time to read and review the cover letter announcing the meetings [here](#) and the actual draft plan [here](#).

### **Notice of Public Hearing**

Public hearings on the draft Vermont State System of Care Plan for Developmental Disabilities Services Fiscal Years 2015-2017 are scheduled for

**Thursday, May 8, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.** -- Comfort Inn and Suites in Barre;

**Thursday, May 15, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.** -- Comfort Inn and Suites in Barre; and

**Monday, May 19, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** -- Vermont Interactive Technologies (VIT) at the following VIT locations: Brattleboro, Montpelier, Newport, Rutland, Williston\* and White River

Junction.

\*Interpreters are being provided at the Williston VIT site.

Please visit VIT website at <http://vitlink.org/location> for studio addresses.

Written comments are also invited, and **must be received at the Department at the address below no later than May 30, 2014.**

For additional information, or to send written comments, please contact:

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Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living  
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### **VSEA Members Urged To Participate In Green Up Day!**

VSEA is encouraging members to participate in your [local Green Up Day efforts on May 3](#). The popular event has been held for the past 44 years, and, this year, there is a special Green Up Vermont App available for free. The App allows users to see what areas have already been “greened up,” and it also alerts the user to any hazards or red flags found along the way. Volunteers can also communicate with each other using an in-app messaging system, and they can find the areas where volunteers are needed most. There is also a mobile-web App for other smartphone users. Developers are hoping the App will allow organizers to quantify how many miles of roadsides are cleaned and how much trash is collected.

### **VSEA Needs To Know If Your Mailing Address Is Different Than Your Home Address**

Many VSEA members have a mailing address that is different from their home address. They may keep a P.O. Box at the post office, or they may have a mailbox with an address different from their actual house address. If this is the case with you, please email the Union at [nstein@vsea.org](mailto:nstein@vsea.org) and let us know! Our reason is that the address information for our members that we receive from the State is unreliable. The State cannot report to us both a “Mailing Address” and a “Home Address.” We only occasionally send paper U.S. mail, but, when we do, it’s important, and includes: Ballots for Union elections, insurance information, and legally-required warnings of Union meetings.

If your mailing address is different from your home address, we need you to tell us!  
Email [nstein@vsea.org](mailto:nstein@vsea.org). Thanks!

### **Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

**May 6**

Elections, Rules and Nominating Committee  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
8:30 a.m.

**May 6**

Steward Training: The Contract & Building The Union  
Fourth Floor Conference  
88 Merchants Row  
Rutland  
9:00 a.m.

**May 9**

Board Of Trustees Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
10:00 a.m.