



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ January 26, 2014 – January 30, 2015

VSEA Launches “Fight Back” Campaign Online Hub

This week, VSEA officially launched a “Fight Back” campaign to educate members about the State’s proposed cuts to services and jobs and to begin to engage as many state employees as possible in your union’s efforts to prevent more damage to the critical public services so many Vermonters rely on, especially in a weak economy.

Every VSEA member should have received an [email earlier this week](#), announcing your union’s “Fight Back” campaign and asking members to contact VSEA to help. So far, the response has been good, and VSEA is pleased to be hearing from members who haven’t been involved much with their union in the past but want to be now.

VSEA has created a “Fight Back” online hub, where members can go to find all the educational materials being produced and disseminated by your union, and the latest news and updates from the State House. **Please visit and bookmark www.vsea.org/fightback.**

Talking State Budget

Starting next week, members of VSEA’s Organizing team are heading to worksites to hold lunchtime meetings to talk with members about the State’s budget proposal and what it could mean to state employees in the coming weeks and months. On Wednesday, February 4, organizers will be at the new State Office Building (Ste. 342) in St. Albans from noon until 1:00 p.m. to talk with members.

If you would like to schedule a “State Budget” meeting at your worksite, please contact VSEA Organizing Director Kristen Warner at kwerner@vsea.org, or by phone at 223-5247.

VSEA Members’ Chance To Weigh In On State’s Proposed Budget! Feb. 9 Public Hearing!

VSEA is urging every member to go to your closest Vermont Interactive Television studio on Monday night, February 9, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. to speak your mind about the State’s proposed budget for FY2016 and weigh in on its call for state employees to produce \$5 million in contract savings (read: reopeners) and for Department and Agency heads to find additional millions in Pay Act savings. If this money is not somehow produced, VSEA members can expect even more service cuts and RIFs, in addition to the ones already contained in the State’s budget proposal, including ill-advised cuts to 911 Emergency Dispatchers, Vermont Veterans’ Home caregivers and Community High School of Vermont educators. Vermont State Colleges and our libraries also take a financial hit, as does the Judiciary.

[Find The VIT Studio Nearest You](#)

[View State’s Proposed Budget](#)

VSEA members can also submit written testimony in advance of the hearing. You can email your testimony to the Joint Fiscal Office’s Theresa Utton-Jerman (tutton@leg.state.vt.us) or Rebecca Buck (rbuck@leg.state.vt.us). You can also fax testimony to 802-828-2295.

VSEA Dispatchers Banding Together To Protect Critical Service & Stop Cuts

This week, Vermont media outlets began covering the fight by VSEA 911 Dispatchers in Derby and Rutland to protect the critical service they provide daily to regular citizens and to the police, fire and EMS services in the communities they serve.

Dispatchers were forced into action after learning that the Administration's budget proposal contained a suggestion to save money by consolidating four Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs; a.k.a. 911 Dispatch Centers) in to just two offices, eliminating the Derby and Rutland PSAPs outright and potentially displacing dozens of seasoned public safety professionals. Wasting no time, Dispatchers reached out to each other across the state, and, working together, they created a Facebook page to keep each other updated on what's happening, what the needs are and how efforts are going to build community support. They also began enlisting the backing of local police, fire and EMS personnel. But the Dispatchers didn't stop there, they also created an [online petition](#), where Vermonters opposed to cutting this critical public service can go to join the growing chorus of Vermonters who strongly disagree with the Administration's proposed cut.

On January 24, the *Rutland Herald* published a story about the proposed cut to the PSAP in Rutland, quoting VSEA member and frontline 911 Dispatcher Ann Masse explaining the adverse impact she and her colleagues believe the proposed cut will have.

"From a Dispatcher's standpoint, this is a safety issue for responders and the public because it can only lead to delays in response time," Massey told the paper. "A lot of people don't understand what we do. You need to know the roads and the intersections and the local landmarks that only the people who live in the area know about." She adds that dispatchers need to understand the capabilities and personalities of the agencies for which they dispatch. To prove her point about the importance of knowing the local lay of the land, Masse cites the example of a tour bus accident last winter in West Haven where the Rutland PSAP had to quickly dispense the emergency services needed to care for multiple victims. "Someone in Rockingham isn't going to know where to find 20 ambulances that can get to the scene the quickest," Masse says. "These are situations where seconds count."

In the story, Masse and her colleagues in Rutland and around the state receive very strong support from the local firefighting community for the Dispatchers' campaign to stop what many in Rutland are calling "an ill-advised cut."

"We think the changes the [Administration is] talking about would be detrimental to us all," says Fair Haven Police Chief William Humphries. "They're our lifeline and they're from this area and know this area. The relationship we have is important. The job isn't as simple as looking at Google maps."

Rutland Fire Chief Robert Schlachter agreed, saying, "Many people might say, 'Hey, this is good, it saves money,' but in other respects, there are consequences that threaten public safety."

And Wallingford Fire Chief Stephane Goulet also weighs in, saying, "It's about trust. You know who you're dealing with and they know you...your capabilities and what you need."

Sign The Petition! Help Protect Vermont 911 Dispatchers

Right now, the biggest thing VSEA members can do to help 911 Dispatchers is to sign the workers' public petition against the cut. To add you name to the growing list of Vermonters opposed to this cut, please [click here](#).

Community High School Of Vermont Workers Create Flyer To Tell Lawmakers The Real Story

Educators at the Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) worked together to create a flyer they will be distributing to lawmakers, summarizing all the great work being done daily at CHSVT facilities across Vermont. The flyer reads:

Staring at a proposed 50-percent budget cut by the State to the entire Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) program, workers there are mobilizing to protect the important educational service they provide daily to Vermont offenders.

This week, pro cut-the-program advocates began tossing around a misleading and dismissive statistic that just 41 diplomas were awarded by the CHSVT last year; a figure they are contrasting with the fact that the CHSVT employs 45 educators. CHSVT workers are calling the statistic a red herring, distracting from all the good work being done at CHSVT facilities across Vermont.

The Real CHSVT Story: Changing Lives, Preventing Recidivism

According to CHSVT's 2013-14 Annual Report, average daily student attendance was approximately 593 students across all campuses, which include eight correctional facility campuses and nine probation campuses.

Also:

- Diploma statistics cited by the State are skewed. Statistics from FY2013-2014 represent a year in which CHSVT was beginning to transition from a credit-based to competency-based diploma structure. The 41 number does not accurately capture a typical year of diplomas awarded;
- In its 2013-14 Annual Report, CHSVT acknowledges that the number of diplomas awarded is decreasing, but for good reason: "In the past, CHSVT has been measured by the number of diplomas granted. Over the last eight years, we have seen a change in population, a gradual reduction in the number of the diplomas granted and a significant increase in the number of industry certifications and higher paying jobs acquired upon release."
- CHSVT students have the opportunity to pursue the following Industry Recognized Credentials (IRC's): OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), First Aid/CPR/AED, Solid Works, Master Cam, NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research), ASE (Automotive Service Excellence), ServSafe, Pro Start, Manage First, Master Gardener, and American Welding Society. During the 2013-14 school year, over 330 Industry Recognized Credentials were awarded to CHSVT enrollees;
- The State's proposal includes the "elimination of CHSVT field sites and all but three facility based programs." In other words, nine probation sites would be completely eliminated; these serve to provide continuing educational services to those who are coming out of incarceration. Five of the eight existing campuses within correctional facilities would be eliminated;
- This cut, under the guise of "saving money," will ultimately cost the state considerably more in the long run. Study after study shows that education and employment are the only ways out of the correctional system and off of public assistance. According to a 2013 study by the Rand Corporation, there is a clear correlation between corrections education and a 43% reduction in recidivism. The study also found that for every \$1 spent on corrections education, \$4 to \$5 is saved in incarceration costs during the first three years post-release*. It is shortsighted to drastically reduce programming that so effectively saves the State money over the long term; and
- The human toll of these cuts cannot be overlooked. The real losers here are the students who are served by CHSVT, their families, and the communities in which they live. Education is their only way out of this cycle of poverty and criminal behavior. To deny such opportunities is ill advised and reckless.

Note: VSEA members can help the CHSVT by calling or emailing your local lawmakers and asking them to stop the cut to the CHSVT. Thanks!

Frontline CHSVT Worker Invites Lawmakers To See The Good That A Service Being Cut Can Do For Vermont Offenders

Frustrated by the State's proposal to cut funding to the Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT), frontline CHSVT employee Jeanne Smith worked up some courage and approached one of her local lawmakers at a January 13 legislative breakfast in St. Albans, asking Rep. Corey Parent to come to the school for a tour. But Smith didn't stop there. She worked the rest of the room as well, inviting other lawmakers to join Parent for the tour.

"I asked the others if they would like to visit too, and everyone was interested," says Smith, a CHSVT Educator. "The tour took place on January 26, and we had one Senator and four Representatives."

Smith says lawmakers were able to view the value of the CHSVT while touring the Northwest State Correctional Facility,

"I showed them the auto and small engine shops, where students get an opportunity to pursue a career and a technical education, as well as repair State vehicles—which is a win-win," explains Smith. "The legislators also visited a class n session, where students were working on a sociology assignment and practicing computer skills. Then they asked students about their participation in the CHSVT program, and the students all agreed that without the school, they would have no other way to change their circumstances or achieve their goals in life."

Smith highlighted one exchange between a student and lawmakers, where the individual explained how the school is helping him obtain his diploma and complete OSHA training so he will be able to apply for a job once his sentence is served. "If [I can't complete this], I have no one and will be homeless again."

"I think legislators were impressed by what they were hearing," says Smith. "When the students were speaking, you could have heard a pin drop, and legislators' jaws were visibly dropping. After hearing from the students, legislators were supportive, saying they understood how important the CHSVT is. They thanked us for inviting them." Smith says lawmakers also asked questions about internal efforts to encourage more offenders to enroll.

Smith tells *WIA* that her personal view as a frontline CHSVT worker is that education is key to helping offenders break free from the cycles of recidivism, poverty and broken homes.

"Our students know this is the case and they are doing everything they can to move forward," she explains. "Instead of doing less, I think more should be done to get more inmates of all ages in need of career and technical training to school."

Note: Great job defending this important service Jeanne! These lawmakers are now hopefully sharing what they witnessed with their colleagues at the State House.

Upcoming Legislative Breakfasts!

VSEA member Jeanne Smith took advantage of a scheduled Legislative Breakfast to make her case to her local lawmakers to protect the CHSVT. The breakfasts are a great forum for VSEA members to talk face-to-face with your local lawmakers about the service you provide and how cuts would impact that service. You can also lobby for new ideas to generate some much-needed revenue.

For a schedule of upcoming Legislative Breakfasts, [please click here!](#)

AOT Member Featured In Story On Snowplow Operators

Freelance journalist Andrew Nemethy [penned a feature this week](#) on what it's like to operate a snowplow during a Vermont snowstorm. VSEA member Mike Bride is the supervisor of the AOT Garage in Mendon, and he takes readers along, as he navigates Route 4 to the top of a "snowy" Sherburne Pass. The story is a nice, light-hearted look at the important service VSEA's AOT members provide every winter to keep Vermont's 3,313 miles of state highways and interstate clear.

Describing what winter season can be like, Bride tells the reporter: "That's the biggest thing with this job, the predictability. There is no predictability. I've seen in a two-week period, maybe 150 hours...70 to 80 hours a week is not unusual."

VSEA appreciates the excellent job our AOT members do every day to ensure Vermonters can arrive at our destinations.

State Raises Mileage Reimbursement Rate

The State issued a memorandum informing state employees that the mileage reimbursement rate, subject to the provisions of the collective bargaining agreements and in keeping with the federal General Services Administration rate structure, increased on January 1, 2015.

Here are the new rates:

- If no government vehicle is reasonably available: \$.056 increases to \$0.575; and
- If government vehicle is reasonably available: \$0.235 decreases to \$.23

Know Your Rights! Organizing, Soliciting And Distributing In Support Of Your Union

Note: VSEA's Legal team asked WIA to clarify members' rights with respect on-site organizing, soliciting and distributing of literature in support of VSEA.

"According to the law and VSEA's contracts, union members and union staff have a right to organize, solicit, and distribute literature in support of the union. These rights include:

- The right to organize and solicit on behalf of the union on non-work time. For this purpose, non-work time includes breaks and meal times; and
- The right to distribute union materials on non-work time, but only in non-work areas, which include break rooms and public areas.

In addition, the VSEA contracts provide that the union may engage in organizing activities on employer premises, so long as those activities are on non-work time, which includes break and meal times. Both union members and staff are protected by these rights. The only difference is that VSEA staff's access to non-work areas will depend on the rules spelled out in the contract as opposed to public areas or break rooms.

The employer cannot discriminate against union organizing activities, including speech or email communications.

These rights to organize, solicit, and distribute are fundamental aspects of employees' legal right to engage in concerted activity, to organize into unions for the purpose of forming or advancing a union, and bargaining collectively. The Vermont Labor Relations Board enforces these rights through unfair labor practice proceedings.

While Vermont law prohibits solicitation in general on state property under some circumstances, that

by the State in the collective bargaining agreements. Under such circumstances, the courts and the VLRB will interpret the specific law as a legislative exception to the more general law. For example, in the private sector employers may generally bar solicitations on their property, but the specific provisions of the National Labor Relations Act have been interpreted to protect employees' rights to solicit and distribute on behalf of their unions.

If any supervisor or manager interferes with the rights described above, please notify a VSEA steward, organizer or representative immediately. VSEA will then take appropriate action under the contract or the law.”

NMU Looking To Fill Vacancies

VSEA Non-Management Unit Chairperson Bob Stone is actively looking to fill several open positions, including:

- NMU Bargaining Team Clerk; and
- NMU Bargaining Team - Law Enforcement Seat

VSEA NMU members interested in any of the above positions are asked to send a letter of interest by close of business Friday, February 6, to:

Bob Stone
NMU Chairperson
c/o VSEA
155 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602

You can also send an email of interest to rstone@vsea.org

Full Slate Of Steward Trainings Next Week

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lench asked WIA to include this list of steward trainings, occurring next week:

Training: Bennington Stewards

Tuesday, February 3
Courtroom #2,
Bennington State Office Building
9:30 a.m.

Training: Central Vermont NMU Stewards

Wednesday, February 4
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin
9:30 a.m.

Training: AOT Stewards

Thursday, February 4
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin
9:30 a.m.

Training: Burlington NMU Stewards

Friday, February 6
108 Cherry St

Burlington
9:30 a.m.

Register Today To Attend VSEA's 2015 State House Day

An online form has been created for VSEA members to use to register to attend the union's 2015 State House Day, which is Tuesday, February 17.

At State House Day (formerly "Lobby Day"), VSEA members are afforded an opportunity to talk with legislators about the services you provide and the issues and challenges you and your colleagues face.

Register today and help make this VSEA's most successful State House Day ever. With Vermont facing a huge budget deficit, it's more important than ever to demonstrate VSEA members' collective power at the State House and remind lawmakers that we're not only state employees who provide services, we're also Vermont voters, and we care about the adverse impact service and personnel cuts have had—and will have—on the communities where we live.

NEK/St. Johnsbury, Rutland & Franklin/GI Chapter Members: Mark The Dates!

VSEA's NEK St. Johnsbury Chapter will hold its next Chapter meeting on Wednesday, February 11, beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the ANR office at 1229 Portland Street in St. Johnsbury. At the meeting, attendees will vote to fill a Council seat and hear from VSEA President Shelley Martin.

VSEA's Rutland Chapter had to unfortunately cancel its meeting this week on January 21. The meeting has been rescheduled for Wednesday, February 11, beginning at noon in the Asa Bloomer Building's fourth floor conference room. The Chapter apologizes for any member inconvenience due to this week's cancellation.

VSEA's Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter will meet on Thursday, February 12, at Mimmo's Restaurant in St. Albans.

VSEA Members Rightly Question Blue Cross/Blue Shield Decisions On Certain Medical Devices

One issue that has come up since the State switched employees out of Cigna into Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS) in 2014 are disputes around certain medical devices BC/BS will or won't cover and the cost associated with some of the devices.

VSEA's Benefits Advisory Committee (BAC) recently learned about one such incident, where BC/BS refused to allow a member to purchase a \$200 foam wedge, prescribed for the member by UVM sleep specialist. BC/BS reported it did not have a code for the wedge, but, instead, they told the member to purchase a \$2000 CPAP machine, and BC/BS would cover ongoing maintenance, mask, hose and filter costs.

To their credit, the member called VSEA to ask why BC/BS would not cover the low-cost solution to his problem, especially a solution prescribed by the member's doctor.

"It took some time and repeated phone calls to BC/BS, but they finally agreed to let this state employee get the foam wedge, saving Vermont taxpayers a bundle of money," VSEA Benefits Advisory Committee Chair Dave Bellini tells *WIA*.

Bellini adds that these are the kinds of cases your BAC needs to hear about, so if you're a member who has also been subjected to similar Blue Cross price inflating, please let the BAC know the specifics and the resolution. if anv. Your name and other specific details will be kept confidential.

To share your BC/BS story with your union's Benefits Advisory Committee, please send a brief overview of what happened to you to vsea@vsea.org, subject line heading "BC/BS Issue." VSEA will confidentially forward your stories to Committee members.

State Employee Wellness Program Kicks Off 2015 Incentive Campaign

WIA is pleased to share this information about the 2015 LiveWell Vermont State Employees' Wellness Program. The program's 2015 incentive campaign "One Life, Live it Well," encourages employees to complete the following wellness initiatives:

- Filling out a 2015 online personal health assessment, via the "LiveWell Vermont" portal: \$50/50 points;
- Completing one of four wellness challenges," which are administered by "LiveWell Vermont" staff during the 2015 incentive year: \$25/25 points;
- Finishing one workshop, via the portal, by November 1, 2015: \$25/25 points; and as a bonus
- Having an annual physical exam conducted between November 1, 2014, and November 1, 2015: \$50/50 points.

Completing these wellness initiatives qualifies active, permanent state employees covered under Blue Cross/Blue Shield for cash incentives up to \$150. Non-plan employees can earn points and qualify for wellness drawings, which are held on a quarterly basis and during challenges.

2015 Challenge Number One – New Year, New You!

Time period: January 19, 2015 – March 1, 2015

Join this six-week weight loss challenge to kick-start your 2015 wellness plan! Create a team or participate solo.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

February 3

Child & Elder Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.

February 3

Training: Bennington Stewards
State Office Building
Courtroom #2
Bennington
9:30 a.m.

February 4

Training: Central Vermont NMU Stewards
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:30 p.m.

February 4

Meeting To Discuss State Budget Proposal
State Office Building
27 Federal St.
Suite 342
Noon

February 5

Training: AOT Stewards
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:30 p.m.

February 6

Training: Burlington NMU Stewards
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:30 p.m.

February 6

VSEA Meeting w/AOE Employees
219 North Main Street
Suite 424
Barre
Pizza & Beverages!
Noon