



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 2, 2014 – February 6, 2015

Make Your Voice Heard. Monday Is Public Hearing On State's Budget Proposals

Monday, February 9, is a golden opportunity for state employees to let lawmakers know how you feel about the State's proposed budget cuts and their impact on the service you provide. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees are hosting a joint public hearing on the State's budget proposal on Monday, February 9 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at 13 Vermont Interactive Television (VIT) locations across the state.

Appropriations Committee members have a tremendous power over the final outcome of the budget process. Join your colleagues in wearing your VSEA t-shirt to the VIT location closest to you. Members of the audience will be given the opportunity to speak to the proposed budget and the impact of such cuts to state services.

Lawmakers need to hear loud and clear: NO CUTS TO STATE SERVICES!

[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.

Save State Services! Sign VSEA's Statewide Petition!

In the past few weeks, state employees may have run into VSEA organizers and members at your worksite, leafleting and soliciting signatures for a petition asking lawmakers to stop the cuts to state services and, instead, seek new revenue sources.

If you and your co-workers haven't yet signed VSEA's petition, **please download a [copy here](#)**. Please also distribute copies of this petition to other state employees in your region. The more signatures we collect, the better.

Information about where to submit your filled-out petition is on the bottom of the document.

Thanks in advance for the help!

Tired Of Cuts? Multiple Opportunities To Make Your Voice Heard At VSEA's February 17 State House Day. Register Today!

On February 17, VSEA will host the union's annual day of action at the State House in Montpelier. VSEA State House Day (formerly "Lobby Day") is where VSEA members can talk face-to-face with legislators about the services you provide and the issues and challenges you and your colleagues face.

Register to attend VSEA's State House Day by [clicking here!](#)

This year's VSEA State House Day features:

- An informal coffee with lawmakers, beginning at 7:30 a.m., right outside the State House cafeteria;

- A noon Town Hall meeting inside House Chambers, providing VSEA members an opportunity to publicly share stories about the service you deliver, the adverse impact of past and currently proposed cuts to services or anything else on your mind; and
- VSEA's annual Legislative Open House begins at 4:00 p.m. Another great opportunity to meet face-to-face with lawmakers in a casual, relaxed atmosphere.

Member turnout will be key this year, as ongoing budget shortfalls continue to increase the size of the target on additional state services and positions. We must fight back against the mindset to keep cutting public services and jobs, as opposed to finding new revenue to avoid cuts and keep vital state services operating.

Again, please [register here](#) to attend VSEA State House Day on February 17. Thanks!

NMU Bargaining Team's Survey Now Live!

VSEA's Non-Management Unit Bargaining Team sent a letter and survey link to NMU members this week. The survey seeks to assess NMU members' bargaining priorities before entering into formal negotiations this fall with the State. The NMU's 46-question survey is comprehensive, covering everything from wages to benefits to working conditions.

NMU Chair Bob Stone is stressing the importance of the survey and is urging as many NMU members as possible to fill it out and send it in.

NMU members can [link to the survey here](#). The Team is requesting that surveys be completed by April 15, 2015.

New VSEA Facebook CHSVT Meme Question's State's 2011 Declaration To Wage A War On Recidivism

VSEA posted a new meme to its Facebook page this week, featuring longtime Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) educator and VSEA Board member Mary Poulos questioning the State's 2011 declaration to wage a "war on recidivism." On the meme, Poulos asks "reduce recidivism?" or "cut the CHSVT program? Which is it?"

Back in 2011, State officials and lawmakers were openly grousing about Corrections costs and the need to bring them down. In a speech, the State's top official told Vermonters that the way to reduce DOC costs is to declare a war on recidivism. CHSVT employees were thrilled by the proclamation because they knew their program is an effective and proven way to lower rates of recidivism. Segue now to 2015, and the State is proposing to deeply cut the CHSVT's funding; a move that CHSVT workers flies in the face of the State's 2011 alleged "war on recidivism" and its efforts to reduce DOC costs.

"This cut, under the guise of 'saving money,' will ultimately cost the state considerably more in the long run," CHSVT Educator Sarah Loveless explains. "Study after study has shown that education and employment are the only ways out of the correctional system and off of public assistance." Loveless points to a 2013 study by the Rand Corporation that found 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," she adds.

One CHSVT educator is also upset that the DOC is not providing lawmakers with data about how many Vermont offenders identified as having "educational needs" are not being placed in the CHSVT system.

"Why are only a small percentage of Vermont inmates with educational needs actually enrolled and regularly attending CHSVT?" asks the Educator. "That's a question I would like to hear lawmakers ask DOC officials because we sure can't figure it out. Is not putting the eligible inmates in our program a

way to keep numbers down and create a narrative that the need is not there? Trust me, the need is there, and we have an excellent staff to produce the results intended.”

Note: VSEA’s CHSVT members are asking all VSEA members to please contact your local lawmakers and ask them to “stop the budget cut to the CHSVT.” Letters to the editor are helpful too.

More Local Public Safety Officials Bemoan State’s Proposed Consolidation Of 911 Emergency Dispatch Offices

On the heels of a *Rutland Herald* story featuring three prominent local public safety officials questioning the logic behind the Department of Public Safety’s (DPS) decision to save money by consolidating four 911 Emergency Dispatch Offices into just two, comes a story this week on *VPR* with even more frontline public safety workers opposed to the ill-advised cut. DPS is proposing to close the Derby and Rutland Dispatch Offices and leave only the Rockingham and Williston Offices open. As reported before in *WIA*, frontline VSEA Dispatchers are concerned that consolidation means sacrificing a local Dispatcher’s knowledge of the areas surrounding Rutland and Derby, as well as losing all their local contacts. In the *VPR* story, Rutland City Firefighter Seth Bride joins the growing chorus of public safety professionals opposed to the State’s desire to have fewer frontline Dispatchers covering larger territories.

“It worries me because on more instances than I can count we have had 911 calls coming in and they are looking for help but don’t know an address,” says Bride. “They give us, ‘I’m off this road, next to Mr. Bill’s Farm Stand; I am by the monument.’ With four of us in the room at the Rutland PSAP we have had many times where we can turn around and say, ‘We have been there, we know where that is, and we can get them help right away,’” explains Bride.

Rutland Sen. Kevin Mullin questions the consolidation as well, correctly pointing out that the offices being closed are located in two Vermont towns that have taken big economic hits in the past few years.

The story also reports that a public forum is being held Sunday at 7:00 p.m. at the Center Rutland Fire Station to discuss the role Dispatchers play in public safety. Supporters of the Dispatchers are urged to attend, if possible.

Note: VSEA Dispatchers are asking all VSEA members to please contact your local lawmakers and ask them to “stop the consolidation of the Dispatcher offices.” Letters to the editor are helpful too.

White River Junction & Springfield VSEA Meetings To Discuss State Budget Proposal

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho will be hosting a series of meetings next week in Springfield and White River Junction to discuss the State's proposed budget cuts and their potential impact on state employees' working conditions.

Springfield

Thursday, February 12
12:00 p.m. AND 4:30 p.m.*
Springfield State Office Building
100 Mineral St.
First Floor

*Two meetings being held to accommodate workers outside the State Office Building (AOT, DOC) and those who need to leave by 4:30 p.m.

White River Junction

Friday, February 13
12:00 p.m.
Gilman Office Complex, Bldg. #1
ESD Conference Room
First Floor

Pizza and refreshments will be served at both meetings.

For more information on the State's proposed cuts, [click here](#).

Questions/Concerns: Contact Tim Lenocho at tlenoch@vsea.org or 802-777-2813

VSEA Awards & Scholarship Webpage Updated

VSEA has updated its [Awards & Scholarship page](#) to include new 2015 VSEA and VSCSF Scholarship application forms and new 2015 forms to nominate Chapters, members and staff for various VSEA awards handed out each year in September at your union's Annual Meeting.

Rash Of Snowplow Accidents Prompts Secretary To Pen Letter Reminding Motorists To "Slow Down!"

Given this week's new reports about four highway accidents involving AOT members driving State plow trucks, VSEA is happy to join AOT Secretary Sue Minter's call this week for motorists to slow down during winter, especially when there is snow falling and deteriorating conditions. In a letter to the editor of the *Times Argus*, Minter wrote: "The best way that the traveling public can honor the hard work of [AOT] road heroes, and the work of our state police and EMS workers, is by partnering with us on the roadway to drive safely. VTrans works hard to make our roads safer, and last year the number of fatalities on Vermont's roads was the lowest since before World War II. The vast majority of car crashes in winter can be prevented by slowing down. So, please help us, your neighbors and yourself by taking extra time, focusing on driving, and helping to save lives."

"VSEA agrees with Secretary Minter," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "Our AOT workers are the nation's best, and we appreciate how difficult their job can sometimes be, especially when, during a storm, someone is in a hurry to get around them or their aggressive driving is causing other drivers to have to swerve erratically on icy conditions. Just use some caution and slow down. A plow driver's job is hard enough."

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

Monte Mason's "Leaving State Service" Party Is Feb. 13!

Longtime VSEA activist and leader Monte Mason is leaving state service, and his good friend and colleague Bob Stone is inviting VSEA members to a going-away party for his friend on Friday, February 13. Here are the details:

We'll Miss You Monte! Party
Spare Time
Colchester
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Unfortunately, the deadline has passed to RSVP for a meal next week, but you can still drop by if you're in the neighborhood and want to wish Monte well.

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

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 any. 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 10

Board of Trustees Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:30 a.m.

February 11

Corrections Unit Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
8:30 a.m.

February 11

Rutland Chapter Meeting
Asa Bloomer Building
Fourth Floor
Rutland
Noon

February 11

NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter Meeting
ANR Office
1229 Portland St.
St. Johnsbury
5:00 p.m.

February 12

Chapter Presidents Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.

February 12

Meeting To Discuss State Budget Proposal
Springfield State Office Building
100 Mineral St.
First Floor
Suite 342
Springfield
Noon & 4:30 p.m. (two meetings)

February 12

Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter Meeting
Mimmo's Restaurant
St. Albans
9:30 p.m.

February 13

Meeting To Discuss State Budget Proposal
Gilman Office Complex, Bldg. #1
ESD Conference Room
First Floor
White River Junction
Noon

February 13

Monte Mason Send-Off Party
Spare Time
Colchester
5:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.