



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 8, 2016 – February 12, 2016

VSEA Questions VOSHA Decision Not To Issue Citation To DCF

VSEA issued the following press release this morning:

VSEA leaders and members are questioning VOSHA's decision early this week to issue just a warning letter to DCF and not a formal citation, after completing an extensive review of Department for Children and Families' (DCF) worker and workplace safety protocols in the wake of Lara Sobel's murder.

VSEA says if a citation had been issued, in addition to levying fines, VOSHA, by statute [21 VSA§225 (a)], would be required to "fix a reasonable time for the abatement of the violation." But the only timeline mentioned in VOSHA's warning letter is a reminder to DCF that "VOSHA may return to your work site in approximately one year to further examine the conditions noted above." In its letter, VOSHA also recommends that "the State voluntarily take the necessary steps to eliminate or materially reduce your employees' exposure to the risk factors stated."

"VOSHA's failure to issue a citation in this instance is very disheartening," says VSEA DCF Social Worker Trissie Casanova, who has been advocating this session at the State House to improve safety protections for frontline DCF workers. She adds, "A lot of the things VOSHA highlights in its letter are issues DCF employees have been talking about with management since January 2015."

VSEA President Dave Bellini agrees, adding, "Just last week, we read about the DCF office in Newport being on lock down after a threat, and, trust me, that's not the only threat these offices are receiving. It seems time is kind of the essence here, and maybe if VOSHA had issued a citation, DCF would have been forced to act on some of these issues in a timely manner. The deficiencies in the letter warrant more than a visit in a year. The time to act is now."

Bellini and Casanova are also asking what would cause OSHA to issue a citation(s), if its DCF findings did not warrant one or more.

"It does make you wonder," says VSEA President Dave Bellini. "The letter VOSHA sent to the State documents many missed items and holes in DCF's existing safety protocols, and it makes the layperson wonder when VOSHA would actually issue a citation. I would think things like safety policies not being fully developed, protocols not meeting minimum guidelines, no one being assigned responsibility for oversight, no annual review and incomplete record keeping might warrant more than a slap on the wrist and a directive for DCF to 'voluntarily' implement the many remedies offered by VOSHA. And that's not even all the findings."

Some of the other findings cited in the VOSHA letter include:

- No comprehensive hazard analysis of the threat of violence in the workplace;
- No evidence that comprehensive controls to address threats had been implemented in each worksite;
- Training was not effective, and is being revised;
- Deficiencies in the procedures and responsibilities that direct workers how to deal with a violent incident; and
- Could not determine if an incident "Response Team" exists.

"The VOSHA letter shines an even brighter light on many of the safety issues and concerns frontline DCF workers want to see addressed before another one of us is harmed or worse," says Casanova.

"Implementing VOSHA's recommendations may not be able to completely prevent another tragic death,

but workers need to know that every measure that can be in place to protect us is in place and is fully operational.”

Manchester Journal Editorial Supports Passing S. 154

The February 10 Manchester Journal published an editorial in support of the legislature passing S. 154; a bill to enhance the penalties for assaulting a DCF and criminalize the act of making threats.”

Here’s an excerpt:

“DCF is having a hard time recruiting qualified people to work in a department that is currently on the front lines here in Vermont. The shooting death last year of a social worker in Barre who was a central player in a child custody dispute has highlighted the need to protect these workers as best as possible. To some degree, these unpleasant interactions come with the territory. This is difficult, and important, work, and none of these folks are getting wealthy out of the deal. They deserve the same support police and firefighters get. Are there ways that perhaps the department could be more efficiently run? Probably. But that’s a different question from safety.”

To read the full editorial, [click here](#).

Register Today! VSEA State House Day Is Thursday, February 25, 2016!

VSEA’s annual State House Day is Thursday, February 25, 2016.

This event is the perfect venue for frontline state employees to meet face to face with their local lawmakers to talk about the service you provide and the challenges that confront you daily, especially when it comes to safety and staffing.

Register to attend VSEA’s State House Day by **clicking here!**

State Hosting Five Joint Public Hearings on State’s Proposed FY 2017 State Budget -- Monday, February 15

VSEA members working at the St. Johnsbury Work Camp, HAEU and the Community High School of Vermont are especially urged to weigh in on the State’s FY2017 budget proposal, during one of five budget “public hearings” being conducted jointly on Monday, February 15, by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

Each meeting is from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in one of five locations across, which can be found [here](#). Time limits on testimony may apply depending on volume of participants.

To view or print a copy of the State’s proposed budget, please click [here](#).

For more information about event format, or to submit written testimony, call Theresa Utton-Jerman or Rebecca Buck, Joint Fiscal Office, 802-828-5767 or toll-free 1-800-322-5616; or e-mail:

tutton@leg.state.vt.us or rbuck@leg.state.vt.us.

Important Meetings For Workers At St. Johnsbury Work Camp!

On Wednesday, February 17, VSEA and employee leaders are hosting shift meetings at the Work Camp in St. Johnsbury to talk with employees about ways to combat the State’s budget proposal to close their facility. It’s a rolling-meeting structure, meaning someone will be in a facility office to talk with workers on breaks, or in between shifts, from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and again from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. There will be an update on the State’s proposal to close your facility, and you can share your ideas with VSEA on a plan to fight back.

Vermont Progressive Party Passes Strong Resolution Of Support For State Employees In Bargaining

Not blind to the reality playing out in front of them, members of the Vermont Progressive Party voted recently to pass a strong resolution supporting a fair contract for state employees.

The Party's resolution begins:

"Whereas [the State is] deliberately pushing toward imposition of contracts with VSEA Executive Branch Units rather than working toward settlement shows serious disrespect for the collective bargaining process; and

Whereas [the State] deliberately failed to include a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) increase for State employees in its 2017 Budget Proposals and is thereby requesting the Legislature not honor nor even acknowledge the position of State workers; and

To read the remainder of the Party's terrific resolution, please [click here](#).

Important Reminder About Messages to the Legislature or the Public!

VSEA members are under attack, both at the bargaining table and in the Legislature, and members' voices are the most powerful force we have. Members are already speaking out, particularly to legislators, so we need to remember some basic ground rules. [Click here](#) to view a memo that outlines some basic points about how to make sure your speech is protected. One of the key rules is this:

When you communicate with legislators, the media, or the public, make sure you are not on work time and don't use the employer's computer!

Nothing will undermine your message more effectively than the suspicion that you are using work time or the employer's property for personal purposes. Electronic messages to lawmakers should originate from your personal email account and not from your state email account. The same goes for posting on websites or blogs. Send your messages from your personal email on break time, or pre- or post-work.

VSEA thanks all members for your attention to this request.

Joint Safety & Health Committee Posts "Complaint Form" To Gather Data From State Employees

For years, VSEA members and staff have served with management on a specially created Joint Safety and Health Committee, which meets periodically to discuss current safety and health issues impacting state employees, your worksites and/or the public. Committee members also strategize together about the best course of action to address a safety or health issue or concern, and they make recommendations to the State.

The Committee asked *WIA* to share that it has recently created [a new downloadable "complaint" form](#) for VSEA members to fill out and submit to the Committee if they are dealing with a safety or health issue and want to file an official complaint. The Committee will review all submitted forms at upcoming meetings to determine if action is warranted, and, if so, what kind of action is appropriate.

If you have any questions about the form, please contact VSEA's staff liaison to the Committee, Field Services Director Gretchen Naylor. You can email her at gnaylor@vsea.org or call her at 223-5247.

VSEA Donates \$750 To Vermont State Colleges' Hall Of Fame Inaugural Celebration

VSEA State Colleges' (VSC) Unit Chairperson Janis Henderson presented a check this week in the amount of \$750 to VSC Chancellor Jeb Spaulding, to help inaugurate the VSC's newly established Hall of Fame, honoring distinguished alumni from each college and one at-large alumni. A special event to celebrate the Hall of Fame's creation is being held on March 9. The contribution was approved by the VSEA Board of Trustees.

"The individuals selected shine a spotlight on the positive impact of the VSC on the economic, intellectual, and civic wellbeing of Vermont," says VSC Board Chair Martha O'Connor. "Each one is exceptional in their field and in their service to the community."

VSEA Hosting Special Feb. 19 Meeting For Employees Working In The St. Albans State Office Building

VSEA is inviting all employees working in the St. Albans State Office Building to a special meeting on Friday, February 19, in the First Floor Conference Room. The meeting begins at noon and the topics being discussed include safety concerns, building issues and needed action steps. Lunch is being provided.

Barre Chapter President Pens Letter To The Editor To Explain & Promote VSEA Lawn Signs

This letter by VSEA Barre Chapter President Sue LaFleche appeared February 11 in the *Times Argus*. VSEA thanks Sue for her initiative and help.

"I am writing to let your readers and the public know why "We Support Our State Employees" signs are popping up across Vermont. They are union members of VSEA's efforts to rally support of Vermonters to protect the services they rely on by supporting the state employees who provide them. We want the state to negotiate a fair contract with its employees.

Displaying a sign in your yard or storefront tells Vermonters you support a fair contract for state employees and you understand the importance of having fully staffed and functioning state agencies and departments. It informs people you reject further attempts by the state or legislators to save money by making additional cuts to services and positions. For many years Vermonters have had to suffer with inadequate or understaffed services due to financial and staffing cuts. This is unacceptable, especially when the demand for services is increasing.

State employees are your family, your friends and your community members. We work so Vermont works for everyone!

If you would like a sign please contact VSEA headquarters at 223-5247.

Thank you for your support.

Suzanne LaFleche
Williamstown

VSEA Central Vermont Chapter Invites Members To Help Distribute Signs Of Support On Saturday

Central Vermont Chapter President Cassandra Edson kicked off the Chapter's sign distribution effort last Saturday, giving out dozens of 'We Support Our State Employees' signs to backers in central Vermont.

"Our goal is to distribute as many of the signs as possible in advance of VSEA's State House Day on February 25," explains Edson. "Let our legislators and the State see the visible support Vermonters have for state employees. We would be happy to have you join us."

Edson and Chapter members will be going out again to distribute signs on:

Saturday, February 13 – 1:00 p.m. – Meeting at VSEA HQ, 155 State St., Montpelier

If you would like to volunteer to help, or if you have questions, please contact Cassandra Edson by email at cassandraedson@hotmail.com. Edson says she is open to working with members to schedule distribution times more favorable to the member's schedule.

NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter Meeting February 17!

VSEA NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter President Ellen Hinman asked *WIA* to remind Chapter members that your next meeting is Wednesday, February 17, at the ANR office, located at 1229 Portland Street in St. Johnsbury. The meeting begins at 5:00 p.m.

If you have questions, please contact Ellen Hinman by email: ellen.hinman@yahoo.com.

VSEA Insurance Program Adds New Easy-Issue, Permanent Life Insurance Option

VSEA is pleased to now be able to offer members an opportunity to purchase voluntary permanent life insurance through the convenience of payroll deduction and easy online enrollment.

PureLife-plus is affordable life insurance with the following features:

- Permanent life insurance to age 121;
- Easy qualification for Express Issue with only 3 work & health-related questions; and
- All with coverage that you own and may take with you when you change jobs or retire - it's yours to keep!

Employee, spouse, children and grandchildren may apply.*

Remember...the State offers 2x your salary in life insurance. This coverage reduces to \$10,000 at retirement with 20 years of service.

Don't miss your chance to protect your family with permanent, portable life insurance from Texas Life Insurance Company.

Watch your inbox for enrollment details!

**Texas Life complies with all state laws regarding marriages, domestic and civil union partnerships, and legally recognized familial relationships. Coverage and spouse/domestic partner eligibility may vary by state. PureLife-plus (PRFNG-NI-10) is an individual, flexible premium universal life insurance product. For details of coverage see the PureLife-plus brochure. PureLife-plus is underwritten by Texas Life Insurance Company, P.O. Box 830, Waco, TX, 76703; 1-800-283-9233 16M016-C (1) 1013 (exp0218)*

NMU Bylaw Changes Due February 26!

Non-Management Unit Chairperson Michelle Salvador asked *WIA* to let NMU members know that the deadline to submit proposed Unit bylaw changes is **Friday, February 26**.

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 0 A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar."

To view existing NMU bylaws, [click here](#).

Judiciary Unit Schedules Bargaining Update Meetings

Members of the VSEA Judiciary Unit Bargaining Team are embroiled in tough negotiations right now with the State on a new contract. To update members on the status of bargaining and let them know what help is needed in the coming days and weeks, Team members and staff are currently conducting a series of information meetings across Vermont

Here are the remaining meetings scheduled:

February 17
Barre
Courthouse
Second Floor Conference Room
11:30 a.m.

February 18
White River Junction
Judicial Bureau
Lunchroom
11:30 a.m.

February 18
Bennington
Jensen's Restaurant
5:00 p.m.

February 19
Rutland
9 Merchant's Row
Noon

VSEA Labor Educator's Winter/Spring 2016 Training Schedule

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho asked WIA to remind about the latest round of trainings he is conducting in the winter/spring 2016. If you are interested in registering to attend one or more trainings, you can do so by [clicking here](#). Please direct your training questions to Tim at tlenocho@vsea.org.

Trainings in blue are for all members.

Steward Training: Supervisory Unit
Wednesday, February 17
VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward 1: Introduction & The Basics

Friday, March 4
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Health Care Facilities

Wednesday, March 9
VTrans District Office,
61 Valley View
Mendon (five miles east of Rutland)

Steward 2: Protecting The Contract & Building The Union

Friday, March 18
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The “Hostile Work Environment”

Wednesday, March 23
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward 3: The Contract & Challenges in the Workplace

Friday, March 25
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Investigations & Working With Human Resources

Wednesday, March 30
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Corrections Unit

Wednesday, April 6
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The Grievance

Wednesday, April 13
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The Labor/Management Committee

Friday, April 15

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Route 302

Berlin

Diversity & Solidarity For Public Sector Union Members

Friday, April 22

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Route 302

Berlin

VSEA Insurance Representative In Windsor Next Week

VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock will be at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor two days next week to talk with interested VSEA members about member-only insurance benefits.

February 17 & 18

Southeast State Correctional Facility

Administration Building

546 State Farm Rd.

Windsor

12:00 to 3:00

Receive information on disability coverage, family life insurance, family accident and cancer coverage. You must be a member paying full dues to be eligible for this VSEA benefit. If you are an agency-fee payer, Joanne can provide you information about signing up for full membership.

Subscribe To VSEA Today!

VSEA's Communications Department is happy to disseminate any and all communications the leadership, Chapters, Units, and others request, however, the lists the Department currently pull from are provided to the union by the State of Vermont. VSEA's Communications Department has found the lists to be dated, incomplete and sometimes lacking key information that was entered by a VSEA staff person but later overwritten or deleted during a State data dump.

To help VSEA more effectively reach active members—and really all those members who want to know what's going on in their union—VSEA will be working hard in the coming months to collect members' emails on its own and begin to build contact lists that cannot be altered by a State download.

You can help us get started by [clicking here](#) and signing up for the VSEA communications you are interested in receiving.

Thank you in advance for subscribing. Please urge your colleagues to do the same.

Want Instantaneous Push Notifications From Your Union? Sign Up Today For The VSEAUnite App!

With the 2016 legislative session fast approaching, VSEA is excited to be employing a new push notification tool to message members faster about important hearings, meetings, testimony, events and other union matters. Any member who has already downloaded the VSEAUnite App does not to do anything, but if you haven't downloaded the free App yet, you can do so very easily.

VSEA's Communications team is stressing that it will not be overloading members' phones with push notifications. Members will also have the option to easily turn off the notifications, if the volume of

notifications ever becomes an issue.

“We’ll be working in the coming weeks and months to increase the number of VSEA members using the VSEAUnite App, with an emphasis on getting a few users from each work site,” explains Communications Director Doug Gibson. “We’ll be aiming to limit the notifications to just information that is important to the entire VSEA membership, as opposed to Chapter- or Unit-specific messages, which, for the time being, will continue to be sent to members via email message.”

VSEAUnite is available for most mobile devices, including I-phone and Android. Once you download the App, you simply register with your name and your VSEA bargaining unit and location. VSEAUnite then allows you to view your Unit’s contract, find contact information for your nearest VSEA steward (to report contract infractions), see a calendar of upcoming VSEA events and read the latest news about working people to hit the wires.

The download is free, so your union hopes all VSEA I-phone, Android and other mobile users will download it today!

Quote Of The Week!

“Implementing VOSHA’s recommendations may not be able to completely prevent another tragic death, but workers need to know that every measure that can be in place to protect us is in place and is fully operational.”

VSEA Social Worker Trissie Casanova, remarking in a VSEA press release on why frontline DCF workers want VOSHA’s safety-improvement recommendations to be implemented sooner, not later.

Deadline To Submit Bylaw Changes Is March 25!

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA’s Master Bylaws is Friday, March 25, 2016. Proposals must be mailed to: Janis Henderson, Bylaws Committee Chair, c/o VSEA Headquarters, P.O. Box 518, Montpelier, VT 05601-0518.

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 0 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 Janis at jhenderson@vsea.org.

VSEA Signs Popping Up! Help Needed With Distribution.

VSEA recently began distributing yard signs to leaders, activists and members, asking them to distribute them to family, friends, neighbors and businesses in their local communities. The signs are timed to coincide with what has unfortunately become very tough bargaining with the State on new contracts covering VSEA members in the Non-Management, Corrections, Supervisory and Judiciary Units.

The next few weeks and months will be critical, as VSEA members in three Units await a fact-finder’s report, and Judiciary Unit members continue to combat seriously detrimental proposals. This is why VSEA is renewing its call to members to help your union with sign distribution, or post a sign in your own yard. Let’s give Vermont a strong visual show of support for state employees and the quality public services you provide. **If you want a sign, but can’t make it to Montpelier, please contact vsea@vsea.org, write “I need a sign(s)” in the subject line, and VSEA will do its best to get your one or more in a timely fashion.**

VSEA Chapter Presidents have developed a few simple talking points about the purpose of the signs, in case you need help explaining to a friend or business owner why state employees matter and why they should post a sign. They are:

- Vermont state employees are primarily Vermonters;
- Vermont state employees are your family, friends, neighbors;
- Vermont state employees live in communities across our state, and the wages we negotiate for with the State go back into our local communities to help keep them economically vibrant;
- Vermont state employees' negotiated wages and benefits raise the standard for all working Vermonters;
- For years, state employees have been asked to give back to help Vermont weather fiscal crises. Because of this, Vermont's quality public services are stretched very thin today and there just aren't enough employees in some areas to keep up with increased demand. State services and the workforce have been cut the marrow, not just the bone;
- Since Vermont leaders have chosen to rely heavily a tourism economy and seasonal employees, it makes employment in state government that much more desirable and also one of the last, viable jobs in Vermont still paying a living wage with fair health and retirement benefits. These are the kinds of jobs Vermont needs to support;
- By supporting state employees, you are supporting a continuation of the quality public services Vermonters have come to depend upon;
- Vermont state employees make Vermont work; and
- Supporting Vermont public services and state employees is truly "the Vermont way."

Post Your Sign Photos To VSEA Facebook Page!

Please remember too, in the coming weeks and months, if you spot a VSEA yard sign, snap a photo and [post it to VSEA's Facebook page](#) or send it VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson at dgibson@vsea.org, and he'll post it for you.

The signs featured with this WIA entry were submitted by VSEA First VP Aimee Towne and Retirees' Chapter President Joanie Maclay. Thanks! Keep them coming!

Threatened While On The Job? VSEA Wants To Know.

VSEA President Dave Bellini is asking all state employees who are threatened while performing your job duties to provide an account of the threat not only to your supervisor or the State, but also to VSEA.

"VSEA wants to begin to compile its own record of threats against frontline state employees, no matter your occupation," explains Bellini. "I'm asking all employees who are threatened, especially those working in AHS, to take a few minutes to fill out an online form VSEA made to collect your report. The information will help us provide a firsthand account of the number of threats being made and where they are being made, in addition to some other things."

Here are the questions:

Name:

Occupation:

Work Base:

Preferred Phone:

Preferred Email:

Date Of Incident:

Where Did Incident Occur:

Name & Relation Of Person Making Threat To Employee (i.e. client, client's husband, unrelated stranger):

St. Johnsbury
5:00 p.m.

February 18

Retirees' Chapter Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.

February 18

Judiciary Unit Bargaining Update Meeting
Judicial Bureau
Lunchroom
White River Junction
11:30 a.m.

February 18

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep. Joanne Woodcock
Southeast State Correctional Facility
Administration Building
546 State Farm Rd.
Windsor
12:00 to 3:00

February 18

Judiciary Unit Bargaining Update Meeting
Jensen's Restaurant
Bennington
5:00 p.m.

February 19

Corrections Unit Executive Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

February 19

Judiciary Unit Bargaining Update Meeting
9 Merchant's Row
Rutland
Noon

February 19

Special All-Employee Meeting
St. Albans State Office Bldg
First Floor Conference Room
St. Albans
Noon

February 19

Retirement Study Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
1:00 p.m.