



Week In Action Newsletter

July 10, 2020

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**Thank you for
your service
during the
pandemic,
but...**

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..... **And More!**

State Refuses To Extend COVID-19 Side-Letter Agreement With VSEA

After WIA posted last week, VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard sent the following email to members, informing you that the State is not extending a COVID-19 side-letter agreement it had with several VSEA bargaining units.

The COVID-19 Side Letter Agreement between the State and VSEA's Executive Branch Units is set to expire on July 4. The VSEA remains agreeable to extending the COVID-19 Side Letter Agreement. I am writing to let you know that, at this moment, the State has not agreed. The Administration has said it is not inclined to extend the COVID-19 Side Letter Agreement in its current form. VSEA believes that the provisions of the current Side Letter are as important and relevant now as they were when first agreed. Today, VSEA again requested that the Administration reconsider and agree with VSEA to extend the current COVID-19 Side Letter Agreement. We await the response.

Please direct your questions about how this impacts your particular agency or department to your Department of Human Resources Representative.

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VSEA Judiciary Unit Members' Activism Leads CAO To (Finally) Investigate Court Manager's Alleged Racist Remarks

VTdigger reports this week on Caledonia County Court employees alleging that an Operations Manager made insensitive remarks as a Black Lives Matter protest

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was taking place outside of the courthouse on June 3. They're also raising concerns that the incident is not being properly investigated by the Judiciary.

From VTDigger Story:

The story reports that "a complaint detailing the comments was sent June 15 to Court Administrator Patricia Gabel, Vermont State Employee Association representatives and state judiciary Human Resources Manager John McGlynn."

&

Margaret Crowley, chairperson of the Judiciary Bargaining Unit, said the Vermont Supreme Court should investigate Gabel and McGlynn for not taking action to investigate the incident for at least two weeks after receiving the formal complaint.

Crowley is a family division case manager in Chittenden County and was involved in the dissemination of the complaint to the VSEA.

"I think that a really big part of this whole movement right now is to hold white people accountable for what we call, what everybody is calling, white silence," Crowley said. "I'm feeling like the judiciary has been given this information, it's been given this opportunity to end white silence, to act upon our ability to speak up and say 'This is not OK.'"

"I feel like there has to be at least some sort of acknowledgment that something happened here," Crowley said. "Set aside her duties, you're not going to report to work, we're going to do some interviews. ... But none of that happened. So again, it's just like brush it under the rug."

Update: The Court Administrator's Office informed some employees this week that it had launched a formal investigation into the St. J matter, claiming they were on it ahead of a call from a VTDigger reporter this week; a revelation many VSEA Judiciary Unit members question. In response, VSEA is reminding members that it was their courage and activism that was most likely the cause of the investigation commencing this week.

Now Is The Time To Send A Letter To Secure Funding For State Colleges!!

VSEA is urging members to participate today in an online letter-writing campaign being sponsored by the VT American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to secure "bridge funding" for the beleaguered Vermont State Colleges system. **The AFT's campaign will continue for two weeks, and all VSEA members are urged to send an online letter.**

From the AFT's online page:

We need a commitment NOW from [the State] and the Vermont state legislature so the VSCS can continue to its economic and social justice mission, "For the benefit of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges system provides affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education, fully integrating professional, liberal, and career study, consistent with student aspirations and regional and state needs."

It is imperative that the legislature appropriate the \$36 million recommended in Vermont State Treasurer Pearce's report to stabilize the system for the upcoming year and demonstrate to potential students that the Vermont State Colleges are still standing and ready to welcome them. There is no doubt that the next few months will present financial challenges and the VSCS must be ready to meet those challenges without incurring further financial damage.

To save our VSCS, we need to make sure that [the State] and the legislature act NOW.



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Vermont State Colleges Unit Ratifies One-Year Extension Of Current Contract

Members of VSEA's Vermont State Colleges Bargaining Unit recently voted overwhelmingly to ratify a one-year extension of their current collective bargaining agreement. The extension was effective July 1, 2020, and will remain in effect through June 30, 2020. As a result of the extension, VSC Unit members will not be receiving a COLA, however they are still eligible to receive a 1.5% increase tied to the employee's performance evaluations, regardless of whether or not the employee was unable to receive an evaluation because of campuses closing due to COVID-19.

"Although our team was in the middle of negotiations when the pandemic struck, it became clear that we did not have a good picture of what we would be up against, moving forward with negotiations," explains VSC Staff Federation Bargaining Unit Chair Sandy Noyes. "By agreeing to an extension, not only will the team have more information, but we can shift our focus now to ensuring the success of the system and fighting to properly fund the Colleges."

Next Week's Steward Training Being Conducted, Via Zoom

VSEA Director of Field Services Gretchen Naylor asked WIA to let VSEA Stewards know that, due to the COVID crisis, the July 17 training, scheduled to be held at the Rutland Holiday Inn is now being conducted, via Zoom.

July 17 Steward Training
8:30 a.m. -3:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

To register for the July training, or another upcoming training, please contact VSEA Administrative Professional Sue Devold by email at sdevold@vsea.org or by phone at (802) 223-5247.

Note: As of July 1, 2020 all VSEA Stewards in the Executive Branch are eligible for VSEA leave time for Steward Training, provided they receive supervisory approval.

State Ethics Commission Seeks Public Input

The Vermont State Ethics Commission will be submitting a draft "statutory code of ethics" to lawmakers this fall, but before doing so, the Commission wants VSEA member, retiree and, in fact, all Vermonters' input.

From a July 8 Ethics Commission press release:

Two bills introduced this last session (H.634 and S.198) asked the Ethics Commission to submit to the General Assembly a draft Code of Ethics which it will consider for adoption into law. While the arrival of COVID-19 preempted full consideration of those bills, the Ethics Commission has been asked and will send a draft Code of Ethics to the legislature this coming fall - but not before seeking public input.

Public Input Needed: Commission Chair Julie Hulburt explained, "It is essential that this draft code of ethics be thoroughly scrutinized. We want the legislature to be confident that issues the code raises have been fully addressed with the benefit of stakeholder and public input. We want to hear everyone's thoughts." Hulburt added, "Please send your comments and suggestions to the Commission." The Commission's website contains the current draft code and an explanation of why statutory adoption is necessary.

Enforcement: The Ethics Commission has been asked, "How will this code be enforced?" The Commission believes adopting a statutory code of ethics setting ethics standards for public servants should come first - before enforcement discussions. Once a code of ethics is adopted, the immediate and most effective way to ensure code compliance will be through ethics education and ethics awareness. The Ethics Commission is a willing partner and resource for public servants.

Comments: The Ethics Commission strongly urges written comments. It will, however, offer an opportunity for oral comments. At 10:00 a.m. on August 12, 2020, the Ethics Commission will hold a virtual public hearing regarding its draft proposal. Details will be posted on the Ethics Commission website soon. The Commission will continue to accept written comments through

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August 26, 2020. It will then consider all comments and suggestions, finalize the draft, and submit it to the House and Senate Government Operations Committees where its journey into statute can begin.

The Commission is grateful for all comments it receives.

TALKING POINTS:

Wisconsin Mandates Masks For Executive Branch Employees

The *Wisconsin Examiner* reports this week that, beginning July 13, Wisconsin's Executive Branch state employees will be required to wear face masks on the job in state facilities or on state business in other enclosed buildings outside their homes.

"The decision to require face masks was made in response to the increases in COVID-19 spread we have seen over the past few weeks," says Molly Vidal, spokeswoman for the state Department of Administration (DOA).

"All state executive branch agency employees will be required to wear face masks at all times while indoors in state facilities," Vidal says. "This requirement applies to all indoor spaces including common spaces, restrooms, break rooms, elevators, cubicles, offices, and conference rooms, regardless of the number of additional people present or physical space between individuals."

A spokeswoman for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which has members in state government but not a collective bargaining agreement, said AFSCME supports the requirement on behalf of the safety of workers as well as the general public.

"Public employees are essential employees," Valerie Landowski, communications director for AFSCME Council 32, tells the Wisconsin Examiner — and many don't have the option of working from home, whether they care for veterans in state veterans homes, take care of children or work in jails and other state and local municipal facilities.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"These are ideas that the American people support, and it is time that the do-nothing Senate implement them. But this I know: nothing will happen unless the American people stand up, fight back, and demand, in overwhelming numbers, that the Senate act."

Excerpt from a petition being generated by Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, calling on the U.S. Senate to provide COVID-19 relief to all Americans, as reported the week in *Truthout*.

NY State Workers' Union Calls On Governor To Install COVID-Blocking Air Filters For All State Workers

From a July 7 *Albany Times Union* story:

One of the state's largest public labor unions is calling on Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to require buildings that house state workers to meet the same air-filtration standards that the governor recently said he will impose on large malls and potentially other private-sector businesses.

The Public Employees Federation (PEF) this week called on the Governor's Office of Employee Relations to mandate the installation of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to protect employees returning to offices as New York reemerges from a months-long "pause" on business operations to slow the spread of COVID-19.

"If New York state is mandating or recommending these filters for large public spaces, businesses and offices, then New York state should follow its own

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recommendations and ensure adequate air filtration for its own workers,” PEF President Wayne Spence said in a news release. “You must lead by example, and this is an opportunity for the governor to do that.”.

Maine Shipbuilders Strike, Caring Enough About Bigger Picture To Forfeit Health Care During A Pandemic

The *Associated Press* reports recently that some 4,300 Maine union shipbuilders are out on strike at Bath Iron Works. The workers are striking over subcontracting, work rules and seniority, while wages and benefits are a secondary concern. The company’s final offer called for a three-year contract with pay raises of 3% in each year.

The story notes that “striking workers will be responsible for their own [health] insurance effective Wednesday, just days after three workers who carpooled together tested positive for the coronavirus.”

“The choice is very simple. I had to strike. There was no other option,” said Brad Farrell, who’s married and has four children, and fears subcontracting and seniority changes could force him out of his job in the tin shop.

Note: VSEA solidarity with the striking shipbuilders. Extremely brave move, especially giving up their health care, which union spokesman Tim Sutter reminds in an article that “Bath Iron Works, a subsidiary of Virginia-based General Dynamics, provided a good insurance plan for workers because the union negotiated for it, and that underscores the necessity of fighting for a good contract”

Update: Union leaders met this week with a federal mediator.

VSEA Has Partnered With Travelers: See How Much You Can Save On Auto and Home Insurance

As a member of the Vermont State Employees Association (VSEA), you could save on auto, home, and renters insurance with Travelers. Learn more by visiting: [VSEA.org/vsea-insurance-benefits](https://vsea.org/vsea-insurance-benefits)

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

Upcoming Calendar:

July 17

Rutland Steward Training
via Zoom

July 31

VSEA Council Meeting
via Zoom

Full VSEA Calendar on [VSEA.org](https://vsea.org)



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