



**Michigan AFSCME
Council 25**

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Michigan AFSCME

Council 25



Q & A

Questions and Answers

about the

*American Federation of State, County
and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO*



Notes

Q What is AFSCME Council 25?

A AFSCME stands for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Council 25 is AFSCME's statewide Michigan affiliate.

AFSCME is:

- The **largest** public employee union in the nation, more than 1.6 million strong.
- The nation's **fastest growing** union.
- The **only** union chartered exclusively by the AFL-CIO to represent state and local employees and the men and women who work for non-profit agencies and institutions.
- The **only** union that devotes **all** of its energies to employees of state, county and city governments and those who work for non-profit agencies and institutions.

AFSCME Council 25 is:

- The largest public employee union in Michigan, more than 60,000 strong.
- Your best choice for service: bargaining, grievance handling and arbitration, legislative action, community services, education and more.

Q What can AFSCME do for me?

A Give you power . . . power that will help decide: promotion policies, job security, fair hearing of grievances, better wages, pensions, and other benefits.

Joining with other public employees in Michigan and across our nation, and with the support of AFSCME's experts in collective bargaining, law, and economics, you can help determine your own future.

Q **Why do we need a union?**

A Because just talking isn't enough. You have to be **heard**; and all by yourself, it's hard to be heard. Big departments, big government, and rules made by people you never see and don't know leave public employees without a voice **unless they organize.**

Through AFSCME Council 25, Michigan public employees have a voice . . . one that is heard on the job, in the legislature in Lansing, in the city halls, county buildings, mental health, nursing homes, hospitals, health care, and private non-profit employers.

Q **What is the difference between AFSCME and the AFL-CIO?**

A AFSCME is one of 54 unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

We work together through the AFL-CIO on common problems that face all workers. When we disagree, we try to work out solutions. Then we go ahead with our own program. We are an independent union. All of AFSCME's decisions are made by AFSCME's members.

Q **What is Collective Bargaining?**

A Collective bargaining is the way you can make real, substantive change - changes on promotions, job security, transfer rights, salary, pensions, and other conditions of work.

Through the union, you and your fellow workers decide what you want. Then union representatives, selected by you, sit down and hammer out an agreement with management on every issue of concern. They sit at the bargaining table as equals with management.

The union bargaining committee represents the united strength of all union members. The more members, the more strength you will have. Before any agreement is accepted by the committee, the majority of members will have to give their approval.

Important terms

Binding arbitration of grievances - The ruling of a neutral third party designed to settle grievances between the employee or employees and the employer. Final and binding arbitration requires both parties to honor the decision.

Collective bargaining - The process of labor/management give-and-take in an effort to reach a working agreement on wages, hours, and conditions of employment.

Contract - A written agreement spelling out wages, hours and working conditions which must be followed by both the union and employer.

District council - A group of local unions which band together for improved services to the member.

Grievance - An abuse of employee rights or a violation of the contract; for example - a denial of a promotion, an improper transfer, dismissal without cause.

Steward - A co-worker of yours who represents AFSCME in your workplace and helps you solve your problems on the job.

membership conventions, and every AFSCME member is eligible to serve as a delegate from his or her local union. International Union conventions are held every two years, in even-numbered years. Council 25 conventions are held every two years, in odd-numbered years.

Q What about strikes?

A The national officers and representatives of AFSCME cannot and will not call for a strike, nor will the officers and staff of Council 25. That is a decision made locally by you and your fellow workers. No one else can make it for you. There have been cases where AFSCME members have found it necessary to take strike action to achieve dignity on the job, and in every case, the decision was made locally. In **most** cases, a strong, well-organized local will not have to strike. By representing the overwhelming majority of workers, the union can win at the bargaining table rather than on the streets.

Q What about public employee associations?

A AFSCME was founded in 1933 as the Wisconsin State Employees Association. In 1936, the new union was chartered by the American Federation of Labor to organize and represent public employees. As a national union, AFSCME has the strength and know-how needed to bargain first-rate contracts, win federal aid for state and local governments, and represent public employees effectively. That's why more than 50 independent public employee associations, with more than 400,000 members, have affiliated with AFSCME.

Q Does the union get involved in politics?

A Yes. AFSCME's Constitution points out that: "For unions, the work place and the polling place are inseparable . . ." Public employees - more than any other group - know their well-being and the quality of services they perform are strongly affected by who holds public office.

AFSCME members work for better government and improved laws. Action by AFSCME and other unions has resulted in important laws providing for vital worker protections including workers compensation, unemployment insurance, minimum wage standards, the right-to-know law, occupational safety and health laws, and many others. In many cases, non-union workers and the public derive benefits from legislative action.

AFSCME members have their own independent political organization called PEOPLE - Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality.

Q How can I get my grievances resolved?

A If you have a problem with the employer, **you need representation** - someone to prepare and present your case. AFSCME gives you that representation.

AFSCME also makes sure you get a hearing by establishing a grievance procedure to which management must respond promptly and fairly. When you are part of a strong union, representing the overwhelming majority of workers, the employer has to listen to you.

Q Does AFSCME represent clericals, professionals, and other "white-collar" employees?

A Nationwide, AFSCME represents more than 500,000 clericals, professionals, and other "white-collar" employees, as well as more than 300,000 health care workers. In Michigan, Council 25 represents thousands of "white-collar" workers including doctors and lawyers. In fact, AFSCME represents more "white-collar" employees of state and local

governments than any other union. AFSCME is a member of the AFL-CIO's Department of Professional Employees.

Q How much are dues?

A The AFSCME International Constitution sets a minimum figure for dues, adjusted annually for inflation. The Council 25 Constitution also sets a minimum. Both provide for lower rates for members who work part time. Within those guidelines AFSCME dues are set by the local union, by vote of the membership - and that means you.

Q What kind of people belong to AFSCME?

A All kinds, across Michigan and across the country: architects, zookeepers, secretaries, school custodians, hospital workers and technicians, nurses, public health specialists, data processors, accountants, lawyers, lab technicians, cooks, sanitation workers, social workers, clerks, auditors, engineers, security personnel, game wardens, parks employees, law enforcement officers, court and probation office employees . . . you name it! AFSCME has members throughout Michigan, and in forty-seven other states, the District of Columbia and the Republic of Panama - and they all have one thing in common: every one of them needs professional representation in the workplace!

Q What does AFSCME know about my job situation?

A Nationwide, AFSCME negotiates and services more than 3,000 written agreements covering employees of states, cities, counties, towns, colleges and universities, hospitals and other health care facilities, and federal agencies. Public employment and civil service standards vary from state to state and community to community, but we are familiar - and experienced - with them all.

In Michigan, Council 25 negotiates and services nearly 500 written agreements or contracts covering the whole range of

public sector employees. Council 25's experience and expertise extends to your job situation whether you're covered by the National Labor Relations Act, the Public Employee Relations Act, or Michigan Civil Service regulations.

At our national headquarters, AFSCME has a data bank with information on pay scales, job descriptions, fringe benefits, and contract language covering public employees represented by AFSCME throughout the nation.

Q What is the union's structure?

A As an AFSCME member, you become part of a **local union** consisting of your office, institution, department, or community. Nationwide, AFSCME has more than 3,000 local unions. More than 400 local unions are located in Michigan. Each has its own constitution, its own regular membership meetings, and its own elected officers and stewards.

In Michigan, as in most areas, AFSCME local unions have pooled their resources to form a **district council** - Council 25. District councils provide services including contract negotiations, grievance handling, arbitrations, education programs, public relations, and legislative and political action. Council 25 offers all these programs in Michigan, backed with experience, expertise, and a winning record.

The AFSCME **International Union**, headquartered in Washington, DC, represents the members on national issues and provides services to local unions and district councils upon request.

Q Who runs the union?

A You do. Every member has a vote in the election of local union officers and board members. Some locals hire staff to provide service to the members. Council 25 maintains a staff of expert professional negotiators who cover the entire state, providing needed services to local unions and members. Council and International Union policies are formulated by