

TEXAS STATE EMPLOYEES UNION PROPERTY OF THE PR



VOL 37, NO. 1

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA, LOCAL 6186 / AFL-CIO

FEB 2018

WE'RE UNION - WE'RE STRONG WE'RE VOTE!



www.cwa-tseu.org



EARLY VOTE: February 20-March 2 / ELECTION DAY: March 6

TSEU members get a jump on ELECTION '18

EARLY VOTE: February 20-March 2 / ELECTION DAY: March 6

hether or not state workers and retirees can win on our issues during the legislative session in 2019 will largely depend on how successful TSEU and our allies are in winning key elections around the state. To increase our success in the Texas Capitol, TSEU needs greater influence over who gets elected. We do this by going door to door and making phone calls to get people out to vote in addition to asking our coworkers to join the union and COPE. By increasing state employee political power now, we can be in a better position to win in 2019! **The March 6th primaries will set the stage for all of our fights ahead.**

For state employees, there is a lot at stake!

State agencies at every level are struggling with high turnover, largely due to low pay and excessive workloads as the result of low staffing levels (see more on page 7); university budgets are being squeezed more and more and now retirement benefits are being threatened (see more on page 10); state retirees are long overdue for a pension increase; and more attempts at privatization or closures will be made at our state hospitals and state supported living centers. The legislature will also be seeking to address the continued crisis at DFPS, especially in Child Protective Services and Family Based Safety Services (see more on page 9). On top of all this, anti-union interest groups will once again be attempting to bust our union by pushing policies that would eliminate state employees' rights to pay our membership dues to our union through payroll deduction. (make your union membership UNBREAKABLE with the form found on page 3)

Get off the sidelines and GET INVOLVED!

The more TSEU members who get involved in election work, the more influence state employees will have over decisions made in the Texas Capitol. This is our opportunity to elect candidates who will not only support state employees, but who will also fight along-side us against the MANY challenges we will be facing in 2019!



Candidate screening, TSEU endorsements:

TSEU members and activists are directly involved in every step of our endorsement process. Members across the state have been participating in screening candidates on topics ranging from protecting our pension to fighting for lower caseloads and higher pay. As a union, TSEU decides to endorse a candidate only after they have proven they are committed to working with us on our issues. To date, TSEU has screened, and endorsed the following candidates (*denotes incumbent):



SD10 Beverly Powell (Fort Worth)



SD16 Nathan Johnson (Dallas)



SD17 Fran Watson (Houston)



HD37 Rene Oliveira* (Valley)



HD52 James Talerico (Williamson Cnty)



HD75 Mary Gonzalez* (El Paso)



HD104 Roberto Alonzo* (Dallas)



HD105 Terry Meza (Irving)



HD108 Joanna Cattanach (Dallas)



HD113 Rhetta Bowers (Garland)



HD115 Julie Johnson (DFW area)



HD117
Philip Cortez*
(San Antonio)



HD118 Tomas Uresti* (San Antonio)



HD120 Eric Johnson* (Dallas)



HD123 Diego Bernal* (San Antonio)



HD124 Ina Minjarez* (San Antonio)



HD136 John Bucy (Williamson Cnty)

---- FOLD IN THIRDS - SEAL WITH TAPE - SEND IT IN! ----

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DOING MY PART TO MAKE TSEU UNBREAKABLE!



ATTENTION ALL TSEU MEMBERS CURRENTLY PAYING UNION DUES THROUGH PAYROLL DEDUCTION:

The same lawmakers and anti-pension groups who are trying to gut our pensions are also trying to bust our union. They know that without a strong union, state employees and retirees won't be able to protect our hard-earned retirement benefits. Fill out and send in the form below or go to www.cwa-tseu.org/Unbreakable to lock in your union membership. It will authorize a switch to bank draft for dues collection should payroll deduction be taken away. Help to make our movement UNBREAKABLE - do it today! Call 512.448.4225 for more information.

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to CWA COPE PC are not conditions of membership in the union nor of employment with the company that I may refuse to do so without fear of reprisal.

AFL-CIO statewide COPE endorsements:

- Governor **LUPE VALDEZ**
- Lieutenant Governor MIKE COLLIER
- Attorney General JUSTIN NELSON
- Land Commissioner **TEX MORGAN**
- KIM OLSON
- Railroad Commissioner **CHRIS SPELLMON**

- Texas Supreme Court, Place 2 **STEVE KIRKLAND**
- Texas Supreme Court, Place 4 **R.K. SANDILL**
- Texas Supreme Court, Place 6 **KATHY CHENG**
- TX Ct of Crim Appeals, Presiding Judge MARIA T. "TERRI" JACKSON
- Agriculture Commissioner
 TX Court of Criminal Appeals, Place 7 **RAMONA FRANKLIN**

Endorsing candidates is just the beginning - now it's time to get to work!

We have a lot of work ahead of us. TSEU members will be participating in block walks and phone banks across the state to ensure that our candidates make it to the general election in November. With the retirement of moderate Republican leaders such as Speaker of the Texas House Joe Straus and House State Affairs Chairman Byron Cook, the shape of the legislature will be much different and even more hostile towards state workers in the 2019 Legislative Session. This makes it all the more crucial that TSEU makes a strong showing this election cycle.

Building a pro-state employee majority.

During the last election in 2016, we picked up four new allies thanks to our election work. In 2018, we hope to maintain those seats as well as adding to that total. Candidates that are friends of state workers in three State Senate Districts along with six more in highly contested state house races (with as many as ten on the radar) could make a significant shift in the legislature in favor of our issues. Our true strength lies with our PEOPLE POWER; with your help we can make a real impact on these races.

Primary Election work:

The following dates are subject to change - more phone banks and blockwalks are being added all the time! Contact your area TSEU office or organizer for the most up-to-date details including meet-up times and locations.

- FEBRUARY 3 BLOCK WALK: Mary Gonzalez (El Paso)
- FEBRUARY 7 PHONE BANK: Fran Watson (Houston)
- FEBRUARY 10- BLOCK WALK: Roberto Alonzo (Dallas) Terry Meza (Dallas) Rene Oliveira (Valley)
- FEBRUARY 17 BLOCK WALK: Rhetta Bower (Dallas) Beverly Powell (Fort Worth) Fran Watson (Houston)
- FEBRUARY 19 Statewide Phone bank
- FEBRUARY 20 FIRST DAY OF EARLY VOTING
- FEBRUARY 24 BLOCK WALK Roberto Alonzo (Dallas) Terry Meza (Dallas)
- MARCH 1 State Wide Phone Bank
- MARCH 2 LAST DAY OF EARLY VOTING
- MARCH 3 BLOCK WALK: Mary Gonzalez (El Paso) Roberto Alonzo (Dallas)
- MARCH 5 State Wide Phone Bank







In January, El Paso TSEU members took part in primary election blockwalk for their area candidates.



[ABOVE] TSEU members in McAllen take a break from their area-wide 'happy hour' meeting. Valley area members have had a series of happy hour meetings recently, and have been planning more. Contact the Valley TSEU office for more information: 956.428.0251



Student debt clinics educating, organizing

TSEU's Student Debt Clinics are a series of workshops with the goal of alleviating individual student debt burdens and working towards a collective response to the student debt crisis. Through these Student Debt Clinics, TSEU is reaching out to union members, state agency and university workers, students, and the broader community to build a coalition with a strong voice for workers - on student debt, university tuition, jobs, and an economy that

works for all of us. At the clinics, we called on all state agency and university workers to join TSEU; while we were asking all others to join TSEU's Solidarity Network. Upcoming debt clinics will be taking place in Houston and Corpus Christi; new clinics are being added. If you are interested in organizing or attending an upcoming student debt clinic in your area, speak with your TSEU organizer or call 512-448-4225. [ABOVE] TSEU members and activists in central Texas attend our Student Debt Clinic training session. These members came away with the knowledge and ability to help others suffering from student debt.

Across the state or around the corner, TS difference - and having a good time doi:



◆TSEU members march in honor of MLK

TSEU members in Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Austin marched in remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. this past January 15. Beyond his legacy as a civil rights leader, MLK was also a labor union activist. TSEU proudly marches along with thousands of others in honor of this great man, his work and his legacy. [left] San Antonio area members participated in one of the largest MLK events in the country, attracting more than 250,000 participants.



[ABOVE] TSEU members at UT Arlington show their solidarity at an organizing event held on campus this past December.



SEU activists and organizers signed up 45 new HHSC members, 14 COPE and collected 26 UNBREAKABLE Bank Draft forms as part of the recent Human Services Blitz. The intent of the Blitz was to grow our strength while informing employees of upcoming battles. Signatures were also collected to help influence the legislature for the restoration of our Grievance Procedure and to fight for a REAL pay raise. Our hope is to use these events as a jump-start to Human Services membership growth, and to follow up with local meetings with area State Representatives about the need to improve working conditions.











TSEU/FPS members hold strategy meetings

When DFPS released a request for applications for private contractors to take over all case management and services for children in care in Bexar County, TSEU members went into action holding several FPS strategy meetings. Since then, similar meetings have occurred across the state. The children, families, clients, and communities we serve deserve quality state services, but decision-makers want to pass responsibility off to private contrac-



tors instead of fixing our agency. Based on past privatization attempts in DFPS and other state agencies, TSEU members know it's never "a done deal." Members have committed to continue to work to defeat these measures. Contact any TSEU office or your organizer for information on our next strategy meeting or to set up a meeting for your office or area.

[ABOVE] TSEU members from San Antonio area DFPS offices hold the first of several FPS strategy meetings designed to help counter the continued privatization attempts in our agency.

SEU members are making a ng it! GET INVOLVED TODAY!



[ABOVE] Austin SSLC workers gather for our winter picnic. State Rep Gina Hinojosa attended as our guest and addressed concerns of SSLC staff such as closure and privatization attempts.



[ABOVE] DFPS Brownsville members are making a strong union presence felt at their office and are ready to fight against further privatization attempts at our agency.









Celebrating the holidays, TSEU style!

This past holiday season, TSEU members at all area TSEU offices (Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Valley, and Dallas) hosted annual holiday gatherings. Additionally, in the North Texas area, we had parties for Terrell and Arlington; in South Texas, we celebrated in Corpus Christi; West Texas members held gatherings in El Paso; while Southeast members attended parties in Beaumont. As the holidays are a time for family, it's nice to celebrate with our union brothers and sisters! [BELOW, FROM THE TOP] Austin, Valley, Arlington, Dallas, and El Paso area holiday gatherings.











Low pay, high workloads drive mass exodus of state employees State agency turnover spikes to 17-year high

ccording to a new report from the Texas State Auditor's Office, 2017 saw the largest number of state agency employees quit the job in nearly two decades. With a statewide turnover rate of 18.6%, the last time Texas had a higher turnover rate, George W. Bush was governor. Nearly 24,000 state employees voluntarily quit the job in 2017. Among that number are nurses, care providers for the mentally ill and disabled, social workers for the poor and unemployed, and parole officers.

The Auditor's report also clearly outlines the top reasons for the mass exit of the state's service providers- low pay and high workloads. In exit surveys with state employees on their way out the door, 70% of respondents said they were moving on to higher paying jobs, and compensation and workloads were tied for the number one thing employees wanted to change about working for the state.

The source of the frustration is easy to find-- since 2010, the Texas State Legislature provided state workers with across-the-board raises of just 5.5%, less than half the rate of inflation over that same period. And while the population of Texas has boomed in recent years to over 28.3 million, the number of state agency employees tasked with serving Texans has actually declined since 1994.

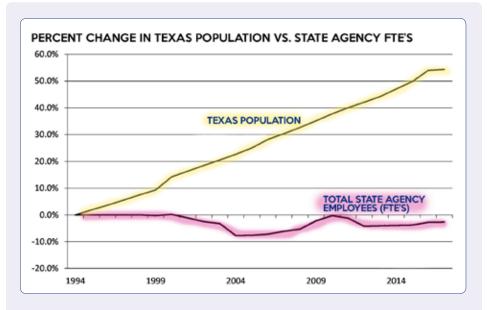
The result is that state employees on the frontlines of providing critical services are working harder for less money. Said Anthony Brown, TSEU President and HHSC Contract Manager, "I see it every day, more and more of my coworkers are deciding that no matter how much they care about the work we do, it's just not worth it to keep working for the state when our pay is so low."

When state agencies suffer from high turnover, the millions of Texas taxpayers who rely on state services are impacted. With fewer experienced, qualified state employees in the trenches, the quality of care for the mentally ill, physically and intellectually disabled, for seniors and abused kids all declines.

Reading between the lines, it's easy to find the solution to Texas' turnover woes- big pay raises for all state workers. One major bright spot in the Auditor's report can be found in declining CPS turnover rates for those who recently

saw \$12,000/year bump in pay. Child Protective Services had a 29% drop in CPS Specialist turnover between 2016 and 2017 when the raises went into effect after an intense organizing effort on the part of TSEU members in CPS.

The Texas State Employees Union is now calling for an emergency, across-theboard pay raise for all state workers from the state's \$10 billion Rainy Day Fund.



QUICK FACTS:

- 18.6% statewide turnover highest in 17 years, since 2000
- nearly 24,000 state employees quit the job in 2017
- 69% of 28,218 separations were people quitting
- 16% of separation were due to retirement
- 14% were the result of termination
- according to exit surveys, compensation and workloads were the two issues with the greatest impact on employees' decision to quit
- compensation was the number one thing respondents said they wanted to change about their job
- nearly 70% of exit survey respondents said they were moving on to a higher paying job
- since 2010, the Legislature has funded across-the-board raises of just 5.5%
- as of Dec. 2016, over 6,000 state employees were receiving Food Stamps (SNAP) and over 30,000 children of state employees were on Medicaid/CHIP at an annual cost to taxpayers of \$119 million
- since 1994, Texas' population has increased by 54.3% while the number of state agency FTE's has declined by 2.7%



TEXAS STATE EMPLOYEES UNION / CWA



1700 South 1st Street, Austin, Texas 78704 / (512) 448-4225 / www.cwa-tseu.org

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I authorize the Texas State Employees Union/CWA 6186 to commence and continue deducting my monthly TSEU dues from the bank or credit union account identified below, in the same monthly dues amount as then on file with TSEU, in the event that dues deduction from my salary, wages, or annuity becomes prohibited by law. I will inform TSEU of bank account changes or changes in employment status. (initial at right)

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The pressure continues building on DFPS "reduce caseloads

and stop contracting out!"

Privatization pilot draws scrutiny, calls for delayed roll-out grow

The pilot for privatization of Family Based Safety Services in El Paso has drawn the attention of local lawmakers, thanks to the work of TSEU Members. State Representatives from El Paso have asked for a delay in the transfer of cases to the private contractor, Pathways, until a transition plan is developed and released by the agency. DFPS announced the contract was signed on January 10th, with Pathways slated to start receiving new FBSS cases March 1st. Prior to entering the contract, Pathways has not operated in El Paso or Region 10, and has no staff or infrastructure in the area. A total of 55 positions will be eliminated by the privatization. The majority of employees impacted will transfer to other DFPS positions in the area.

DFPS did not require Pathways to develop a transition plan for current FBSS cases. This pilot represents the only active contract for any case management responsibilities in any part of DFPS. Under the Foster Care Redesign model, children in state custody still have a state caseworker. Contractors under the new Community Based Care (CBC) model would assume case management responsibilities, but no contracts have been announced or released publicly.

The privatization of case management raises serious questions about accountability, transparency, and the use of resources. Florida, which has privatized nearly all aspects of their CPS system, has struggled to hold contractors accountable for keeping track of and providing services to children in foster care. Media investigations have also revealed the private contractors have paid their Executives extravagantly, while providing minimal services for foster kids. Judges have publicly vented about their inability to hold the state or contractors responsible when court orders are ignored.

TSEU members and our allies will continue to fight the privatization of our agency. The families and communities we serve deserve better.

Federal lawsuit, legal wrangling continue

On Friday, January 19th, Judge Janis Graham Jack issued the Final Order in the federal lawsuit brought against DFPS by the advocacy organization, Children's Rights. In December 2015, Judge Jack ruled that Texas' foster care system violated the constitutional right of foster children to be kept free of harm by the State. The 2015 ruling called for Special Masters to be appointed who would work

with DFPS and the plaintiffs to develop an Implementation Plan to ensure the safety and well-being of foster children. The plan developed by the Special Masters was released last month to allow more input from DFPS and the plaintiffs before being issued as the Final Order from Judge Jack.

A critical part of the Implementation Plan is the mandate that DFPS- or any private agency contracted to perform case management- keep CPS Conservatorship caseloads in the 14-17 children per worker range. The Implementation Plan recognizes the clear need to set caseload standards to improve outcomes for children in foster care. Since the lawsuit was focused on children in Texas' custody, the caseload standards would only directly apply to CPS Conservatorship.

After Judge Jack issued the Final Order, the State won a temporary stay from the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals to stop Judge Jack from enforcing mandates contained in the Order. A hearing on the emergency stay will be held in roughly a month, according to coverage from the Dallas Morning News. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has already announced plans to appeal the Final Order, which could take a year or more to pass through the process. So far, Texas has lost every appeal related to this case at the 5th Circuit since the lawsuit was originally filed in 2011.

----- SEAL WITH TAPE - SEND IT IN! -------

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ATTENTION TRS MEMBERS: Take action NOW

to save our pensions

espite a very good report on the health of the pension fund in December, anti-pension lawmakers and groups are pushing for TRS to lower its expected rate of return. State law requires TRS to conduct an experience study only once every 5 years. The last study conducted in 2015 indicated that TRS' 8% assumed rate of return was reasonable. The TRS 2017 experience study was conducted 3 years too soon and is anticipated to recommend that TRS lower the assumed rate of return.

Such a move would be a huge blow to the funding status of our retirement benefits. A lower expected rate of return means TRS pensions will suddenly appear to be in much worse financial health. TRS' ability to provide retirees a long overdue cost of living increase depends entirely on an accurate projection of the health of the fund, something that would be hindered by a study conducted sooner than the 5-year time frame required by law. If TRS appears to be in bad shape, it also makes it easier for lawmakers to justify taking away our pensions and pushing state university workers into risky 401(k)-style plans. TSEU members fought hard and succeeded in defeating several 401(k) conversion bills in the 2017 legislative session, but the fight is not over and we must continue to organize.

Very soon the TRS Board of Trustees will vote on whether or not to accept the recommendations of this politically-timed study and lower the assumed rate of return below 8%. If they vote to lower it, the health and sustainability of our pension will take a huge step backward, and the door will be open to losing our defined benefit pension plans completely.

ACT NOW!

- Send an Email to the TRS Board of Trustees We must urge the TRS Board of Trustees to protect our pensions by rejecting any recommendation made by the 2017 experience study to lower TRS' assumed rate of return. Let them know there's no reason to make this change and it will only hurt current and future retirees. The 2017 experience study is being rushed for political reasons, and as such, urge them to reject its recommendations. Send an email today to: trscomments@trs.texas.gov
- Go to www.cwa-tseu.org/TRSpetition On the TSEU website, we have posted our petition to the TRS Board. Download a copy of the petition and distribute it among fellow TRS members. Add your name to the hundreds of others calling on the TRS Board to DON'T RUSH THE STUDY PROTECT OUR PENSIONS.



TSEU Executive Board and TRS member Anne Lewis [seated at the far left] addresses the TRS Board during their Fall meeting; defending our pensions from a harmfully-timed study expected to lower the rate of return for the fund, eliminating prospects for a COLA for TRS members.



TSEU EXECUTIVE BOARD

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- Anne Lewis (UT-Austin) Region 8

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- Taylor Jones, Organizer
- Amanda Weems, Organizer
- Tyler Sheldon, Political Organizer
- Debbie Haun, Office Manager
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New TSEU Executive Board sworn in at recent meeting of board members, staff



SEU Executive Board members who were elected last Fall were sworn in during the January 27th, joint staff/e-board meeting. Executive Board members are elected by the TSEU membership to three-year terms. The e-board oversees the implementation of our union's organizing and political programs and provides financial oversight.

TSEU's newest Executive board (pictured at left, along with TSEU's organizing staff) is comprised of long-time activists, committed to moving TSEU forward during these difficult times for union members AND for state workers. TSEU board members and staff are fired up and ready to take on the challenges ahead. On behalf of the membership, TSEU extends its congratulations to these upstanding union members!