

I am Lisa Swenny, AFSCME President and I have been employed with the County Clerk's office almost 15 years.

The American Plan Rescue Act was to aid those facing unprecedented strain in the wake of the COVID crisis. Essential Workers can receive premium pay increases and all members of FOP also received a hazardous duty bonus. We understand the FOP MOU was pushed through rapidly because of a deputy shortage. But all members of FOP, including dispatchers, jailers, secretaries, and janitors received an hourly wage increase plus a lump sum payment. The county also agreed to eliminate the employee contribution of \$53 per pay for health insurance providing participation in the wellness program. We made the county aware in August we would want to bargain for ARPA funds, and we have been proposing dates since December, only to have a tentative date scheduled for March 15. We were recently told that funds will not be available until next budget cycle-beginning September 1. Members of AFSCME are here tonight to ask why we are not extended the same respect and consideration as FOP members?

I started writing a negative speech. It detailed how for years AFSCME members have felt unappreciated, dejected and how we are not worthy of "Essential Worker Premium Pay" increases. However, I believe there is enough negativity in this room and throughout the county. So instead, I am going to tell you some of the positive things we do for you and all of Shelby County.

Our Animal Control Warden has been here since 2011. He contracts with all municipalities within the county except two but will also assist them as emergencies arise. He maintains a clean and healthy environment for our lost and homeless animals. Shelby County has a very low euthanasia count. He enters properties unaware of what he might encounter, in fact he enters a lot of the same properties as our deputies. But the main difference is, he goes in alone and does not have a weapon on his body for protection. He has also asked for ARPA fund assistance to purchase a bullet proof vest but has yet to receive a response on that either. Why shouldn't he receive the same "Hazardous Duty Bonus" received by FOP members?

Next, is our highway laborers. One of our laborers has served Shelby County for almost 40 years. Think about all he has done to improve this county in that period of time....since 1982! Our laborers keep our county roads safe for travel. Last month, when the courthouse was closed during inclement winter weather; they were out there working tirelessly clearing county roads. If it wasn't for our laborers, how would the deputies, rescue squad and ambulances get to emergencies during storms? Every day they work with heavy, dangerous equipment and vehicles. They save the county money by performing their own maintenance on equipment. Some laborers are required to obtain a semi-truck license, attend and pass chemical spray classes, and all must take flagging courses. They are working along our county roads as drivers speed by; we all know how deadly this can be. And yet again, we ask why they are not deserving of a hazardous duty bonus?

What office faced an unprecedented strain in the wake of COVID more than our Health Department? Those members are the definition of an essential employee. Their workloads increased tremendously the last two years. They had to learn new functions, create new positions like "contact tracer" and adapt quickly to continuously changing CDC guidelines and state orders; all while keeping the county safe and healthy. One of our members, has worked over 20 years and part of her job is to inspect restaurants. During the pandemic, she handled complaints and gave guidance regarding guidelines at restaurants and schools. She also conducts septic inspections and investigates properties when the Health Department is called because of outdoor neglect, trash and waste issues. She puts herself on the line to diffuse tense situations when a landowner is upset that the county has been called to their property. If this was your daughter, wife or granddaughter, would you then think she deserved a hazardous duty bonus?

Our members in the assessor's office are required to have certain qualifications. They first must achieve becoming a certified IL Assessing Officer, which can be a four-year process. Both union members received their CIAO in one year. Then, all active certified IL Assessing Officers must complete 60 hours of continuing education over another four-year cycle and are required to pass examinations. This office completes assessments, keeps property ownership updated and assists homeowners to apply for property tax exemptions which provides savings to property owners. Without this office, all the taxing districts (including this county and our schools) would not receive their funding in a timely manner.

We have three members in the Circuit Clerk's office, they assist people currently in a bad situation, whether it be a divorce, paying fines or attending court. Most are not happy about being in that office. Because they lack full-time security, they must attempt to manage unruly and disruptive customers until a security guard can arrive. They have unknowingly and unlawfully been recorded both in person and over the telephone. Because of these issues, safety is a major concern for them. During the pandemic, they had to adjust their whole routine and learn new technology to hold court via Zoom.

COVID impacted the County Clerk & Recorder's office during the last three elections. Many laws were changed, elections judges were not as willing or able to work, and the amount of those voting early, by mail and curbside increased exponentially. The November 2020 was one for the record books, over 1/3 of the registered voters either voted in the office or by mail; that was over 5,000 voters. Staff members were in continuous contact with voters that either tested positive or were under quarantine and could not go to the polling place on Election Day, which required them to vote by mail or curbside vote. That office worked diligently to keep Shelby County election judges and voters safe.

Shelby County benefits from having a bookkeeper in the Treasurer's office with almost 30 years of experience. She manages 57 funds and 83 bank accounts. She is our second longest employee in the county. Our last contract had a 25-year cap on longevity. Because of this cap, both she and our other member with almost 40 years of experience missed a longevity increase. During negotiations in August, we tried to bargain that increase for them and were denied. We then asked if they could receive a \$500 base salary increase. But this too was rejected. It's ironic that our two members with almost 70 years of experience can't receive \$1,000 but 4 FOP members leaving the county can receive a total of \$14,000 under the retention bonus after ending their employment from the county.

I believe we have demonstrated that our work is both essential and hazardous. Working at the courthouse, we have been verbally threatened, had a bomb threat in 2008, screamed and cursed at. But the most disrespect we have felt has been by the board. We hear you say, "the county needs to show loyalty to employees, especially at a time when retention and recruiting is tough" and "that the job market is for the person willing to work...too bad there is not enough of them today." You tell us our wages are already premium and we are lucky to work for the county. I think it's the county that is lucky to have us working here. Shelby County has 20 members of AFSCME with over 237 years of experience, we have demonstrated we are dedicated, loyal and willing to work and yet we still can't seem to get a negotiation meeting scheduled. Employee morale is at an all-time low. If you want to improve morale, show us some respect, reward our loyalty and dedication by negotiating with us for the same increases that other Shelby County employees received.