



The AFSCME Retirees, which began operation in 1980, is an expanding national network of retired public sector workers. In the last twenty years, the program's membership has grown from 60,000 to almost 250,000 dues-paying retirees in 40 chapters and 250 local sub-chapters.

The program was established by an amendment to the AFSCME Constitution that created a separate new structure for retiree membership in the union. The AFSCME International Executive Board (IEB) established guidelines for the program's operation.

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Membership is open to all retired public employees who were members of AFSCME or who were eligible to be members while working. Spouses are also eligible to join and are encouraged to participate in retiree activities.

STRUCTURE

Local

AFSCME retiree chapters and sub-chapters are similar to the council and local union structure for working members. As with the local unions, chapters and sub-chapters elect their own officers, set their own priorities and establish their own budgets. They have the same rights of autonomy as any AFSCME affiliate. Model constitutions for AFSCME chapters and sub-chapters have been developed in accordance with the International Union Constitution.

National

Direction at the national level is formulated by the AFSCME Retirees Council. This body, composed of the Presidents of all affiliated retiree chapters (with some additional representation for our largest retiree groups), establishes priorities for the program. National program priorities generally can be divided into the following areas: federal policy and legislation affecting senior citizens; retiree education, training and mobilization; organizing; and state/local policies and legislation on public retiree issues.

The Retirees Council meets annually and elects its own Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary. The IEB has a retirees committee, which is the vehicle for consideration of any changes proposed by the Retirees Council.

At the 1986 AFSCME Convention, delegates adopted a constitutional amendment that provides each retiree chapter with a voice and a vote at the International's biennial conventions. At the 2006 AFSCME Convention, a constitutional amendment was adopted making the Chair of the Retiree Council its official representative to the IEB

Dues

The minimum dues for a chapter member are \$15.00 per member per year, with \$11.40 remaining on the state and local levels. The International's retiree fee is \$3.60 per member per year. Chapters are free to raise their dues above the minimum and many have done so in order to have additional resources for their activities.

Benefits

Members receive an official membership card from the International. They also receive subscriptions to AFSCME's national magazine, *AFSCME WORKS* (which often features retiree issues) and the AFSCME Retirees quarterly newsletter, *PrimeTIME*.

AFSCME extends to the retirees any benefit in the AFL-CIO Union Privilege Benefit Program to which the International subscribes (known as "AFSCME Advantage" benefits). Currently, these include the MasterCard, low-cost life insurance, discount legal services, and low-interest mortgages, among others. If a working member retires and wants to continue these benefits, the retiree must join an AFSCME Retiree Chapter.

Support from AFSCME Council and Locals

Many AFSCME councils and large unaffiliated locals have actively sponsored the organization and development of retiree chapters. Several provide office space, legislative assistance and general support services to their group. In addition, the retiree chapter members are generally included on the subscription lists for union newspapers, which frequently publicize chapter activities and retiree issues. As a parting gesture of support and appreciation, local unions are urged to pay the first year's dues in the retiree chapter for their retiring members.

CHAPTER ISSUES

AFSCME retiree chapters serve to unite and mobilize retirees behind common goals, particularly the protection and improvement of their public sector pension and health benefits. With these benefits under increasing attack, public sector retirees must be constantly on the alert for what is often an insensitive political system.

Skyrocketing increases in health care costs have become a particular concern, since they can lead to cost-shifting to retirees, cuts in benefits and diminished options for care.

There are also problems on the pension side, especially in the area of post-retirement pension adjustments, which don't exist in some public retirement systems. In order for retirees to maintain their pensions' buying power, they need to receive automatic annual adjustments or periodic ad hoc increases.

Both the health care and pension issues are central to the legislative programs of AFSCME retiree chapters around the country.

On the national level, AFSCME and its retiree chapters are involved in a wide range of Federal issues that are important to senior citizens. These include protecting Social Security and Medicare, fixing problems in the Medicare prescription drug benefit, controlling prescription drug and health care costs, and establishing a system of universal coverage of long-term care.

The AFSCME Retirees represent the interests of retired public employees through membership in major national coalitions, such as the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, the National Conference of Public Employee Retirement Systems and the public sector Coalition to Assure Retirement Equity (CARE). The AFSCME Retirees are also a supporting organization of the Alliance for Retired Americans, the only senior citizen organization endorsed by the AFL-CIO.