

## WORKERS RIGHTS

# AFSCME to Multnomah County: 'no thanks'

Multnomah County proposes to let 100 on-call workers into the union, while leaving 200 out.

By Don McIntosh

Across Multnomah County government, about 300 on-call and temporary workers are employed in multiple departments, doing the same jobs as union-represented regular permanent employees, but at lower pay, and without benefits or union representation. Bothered by the disparity, in early 2017 over half of them signed cards to join AFSCME Local 88 — the union that represents 2,600 of their Multnomah County co-workers. Based on state law, they thought that was all they needed to do to join the union.

But attorneys for Multnomah County filed objections, arguing that on-call and temp workers shouldn't be in the same bargaining unit as their permanent co-workers, because they don't share a "community of interest." A state administrative law judge bought that argument, but was overruled by the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB). Now union and county leaders are trying to settle the dispute. If they can't agree, leaving it to ERB to resolve might require the two sides to litigate the "community of interest" question for every one of 75 separate job classifications — a costly and time-consuming prospect.

On Jan. 24, Multnomah County made a settlement offer: add about 95 workers in 10 classifications to the union bargaining unit, while leaving 219 workers in 65 other classifications still unrepresented. That didn't go over well with the county workers who are active in the union campaign.

"That's not what being part of a union is about," said on-call mental health crisis line worker Celia Throop, who's in one of the jobs the county agreed to add to the union. "We're in this together."

Throop and others in her position fill vacancies when regular employees are attending trainings, on vacation, or out on sick leave. Throop says she's worked 2,000 hours in the last 12 months — basically full-time — but unlike the workers she fills in for, she gets no health insurance, no retirement benefit, no shift differential pay, no pay step increases, and no union representation.

"We do the same work, in the same conditions, and yet are treated a lot differently," Throop told the Labor Press.

At a Jan. 30 meeting of the

union organizing committee, Throop and others rejected the county's offer overwhelmingly.

"The County prides itself on being a progressive employer, but it's not acting like it," said

Jane Corry, a youth librarian who works on-call at the Multnomah County Library. "It's not fair to on-call workers to be treated as though the work they're doing is lesser."

"They need to recognize all on-call workers, not just some," said bilingual library assistant Sara Garcia Gonzalez. Garcia Gonzalez used to be a permanent full-time library employee — and a union steward — but now works on-call, with no benefits, no union representation, and about \$3 less in hourly wages. She and other workers active in the campaign concluded that the county's offer was meant to divide them.

"The county is always talking about equity, inclusion, diversity ... I want to see action."

## YOU CAN HELP

Local 88 is asking supporters to call Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury's office at 503-988-3308 and politely but firmly urge the Chair to agree to add all on-call and temp workers to the union bargaining unit. Find more information, and a sample script and talking points at <https://bit.ly/2XVyk2i>

"We do the same work, in the same conditions, and yet are treated a lot differently."

— Celia Throop, on-call at Multnomah County's mental health crisis line

## MDA Labor Bowl March 31

The 30th annual Labor Bowl Challenge, a fundraiser for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, will take place March 31. Coordinated by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82 and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, the event consists of four-person bowling teams that compete for prizes. Money is raised through pledges and from a silent auction and goes to buy wheelchairs and braces for children, as well as for research and summer camps. Since the Labor Bowl began in 1989, union members have donated \$392,119 to MDA.

- **Time:** Sunday, March 31, registration 10:30 a.m.; Bowl 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
- **Place:** KingPins Family Entertainment Center, 2725 SW Cedar Hills Blvd., Beaverton
- **Cost:** \$60 minimum to raise per bowler
- **For more info:** Call NALC Branch office at 503-493-5903.

## Portland Labor Notes School April 6

Union activists from across the Pacific Northwest will build solidarity with a day-long series of skill-building workshops and strategy discussions April 6. The event is organized by the magazine Labor Notes and sponsored by AFSCME Local 88, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, Portland Association of Teachers, and Reynolds Edu-

cation Association. The keynote will be delivered by a Los Angeles teachers union member who will talk about the successful teachers strike. Workshop topics include how to organize a union in your workplace, how to beat apathy, how to turn an issue into a campaign, how to build labor-community coalitions, and how to organize contract campaigns that win.

- **Time:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 6
- **Place:** Pacific Northwest Carpenters Training Center, 4222 NE 158th Ave., Portland
- **Cost:** \$10, includes a light breakfast, coffee, lunch, and workshop materials
- **Register:** Register online at [labornotes.org/pdx](http://labornotes.org/pdx)
- **Info:** email [labornotespdx@gmail.com](mailto:labornotespdx@gmail.com) or call 971-998-7340

## Labor happy hour April 12 to benefit LCSA

Labor's Community Service Agency is hosting a union-wide happy hour on Friday, April 12, at Lagunitas Community Room in Northeast Portland. The evening includes a complimentary Spin Catering Taco Bar (sponsored by Kaiser Permanente) and \$4 craft beers. Non-alcoholic drinks will be provided by American Income Life. All proceeds go to Labor's Community Service Agency and its solidarity programs.

- **Time:** Friday, April 12, 6-9 p.m.
- **Place:** Lagunitas Community Room, 237 NE Broadway, Portland
- **Cost:** Complimentary taco bar and \$4

pints. Non-alcoholic drinks compliments of American Income Life

- **More info:** Call 503-231-4962 or email [director@lcsaportland.org](mailto:director@lcsaportland.org)

## Healing the Healthcare Blues' fest April 27

The 8th Annual Inner City Blues Festival, "Healing the Healthcare Blues," returns April 27 to the North Portland Eagles Lodge, 7611 N. Exeter (at Lombard). Doors will open at 5 p.m. and music runs until 11 p.m. The Blues Festival is a fundraiser for Health Care for All Oregon (HCAO), an organization working to educate Oregonians and advocate for universal, publicly-funded health care. In addition to music, there will be a silent auction, two bars, dinner and dessert for purchase, as well as a community village. Admission is \$25 in advance. Follow on facebook: [www.facebook.com/events/2118218138426966/](http://www.facebook.com/events/2118218138426966/)

## Labor history conference in Portland May 3-5

The Pacific Northwest Labor History Association will hold its annual conference May 3-5 at the University Place Hotel and Convention Center, 310 SW Lincoln, Portland. This year's theme is "General Strike 1919-2019: Radicalism, Repression, and Solidarity." PNLHA is still looking for contributions to help put on the conference. Donations can be sent to: PNLHA-2019 Conference, 8734 NW Wood Ave., Portland, OR 97213. For more information, contact Jim Cook at 503-703-1693, or [jmelvincook@gmail.com](mailto:jmelvincook@gmail.com).

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