



ERIC JACOBSON

AFSCME Local 66 members, including Becca Maki, Kate Karakash, Carolyn Pohjonen and Jake Littler, joined AFSCME Council 65 Local 454 members in the picket line on March 12, 2024.

GET TO KNOW YOUR UNION

Negotiating Team

Our negotiating team is comprised of 10 members who are elected at the start of a contract cycle. The most recent team was elected in 2022, and a new team will be elected in 2025, the year our current contract expires.

When not in active contract negotiations, the team continues to do work before new members of the next negotiating team are elected. So far this cycle, the team has tackled a number of items.

- Employees in Solid Waste were assisted in getting their needs met and are waiting for the employer to respond for some specific items.

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Wage step changes

Near the end of the 2023 calendar year, St. Louis County announced a change to the way employees progress in their wage steps. The reason for the change was not explained, but employers do not act without motivation.

Over the course of the past year, members of AFSCME Local 66 filed several grievances concerning wage disparities. The issue was pursued vigorously, and following

coordinated pressure across the AFSCME bargaining units, the County capitulated.

“We are proud of the solidarity workers have shown through their grievance process, and we are excited to address the difficulty of understanding the wage grid for workers in our Union.” said Kate Karakash, chair of the Basic Merit

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Upcoming Events

**New employee orientation
(10-10:30 a.m. all days)**

- June 17, Virginia GSC (Yellow Birch Room)
- June 18, Hibbing Annex (Lower Level Room)
- June 20, Duluth GSC (Miller Creek Room)

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Organizing Committee.

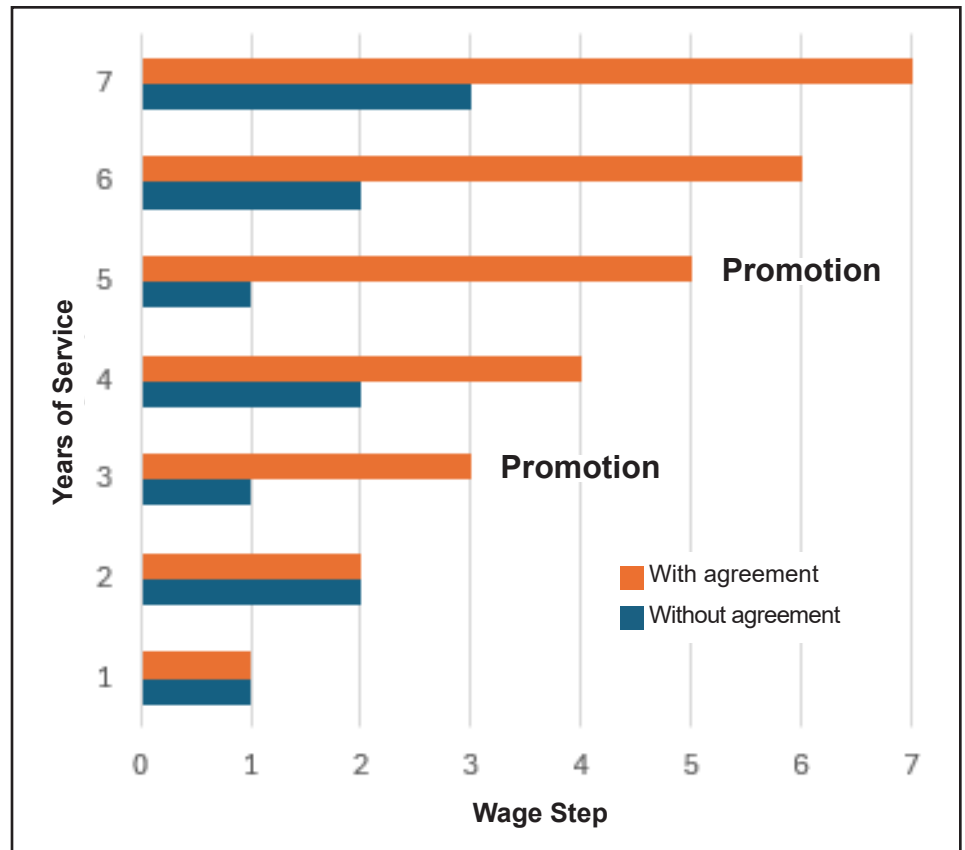
Prior to the County's concession, many employees saw a significant lag between their years of service and their assigned wage steps. The lag was explained as a byproduct of the 2022 pay plan agreement that allowed employees to move between steps more quickly.

The change Union members fought to secure placed all current employees on the wage step commensurate with their years of County employment.

A memorandum of understanding to effect the change was signed following talks with Union leadership on Nov. 7, 2023. The Union also agreed to a three percent wage increase across all pay grades and steps, which was applied on top of the previously-negotiated three-percent raise.

"It's always a priority for us to work for the strongest wages across the board," said Eric Jacobson, AFSCME Local 66 field representative. "We've heard that the wage grid has become hard to read because of the slow implementation plan and the MOUs."

At this time, the County has not committed to paying employees at the wage step corresponding to their years of service moving forward, but Jacobson said the fight for fair wages and a simplified wage grid will continue.



For employees assigned to a lower wage step due to promotion, the recent agreement was especially beneficial. The above chart shows the wage step progression of a Basic Unit employee promoted in years three and five of employment.

New promotional rules

At its Oct. 23, 2023 meeting, the St. Louis County Civil Service Commission voted to remove the local government salary cap, which was repealed by the Minnesota Legislature, and to update the rule on applying pay steps during promotion.

Previously, employees were capped at a step "not to exceed a 9% increase

from the employee's current rate." Now, employees will be placed on the next highest step of the new pay grade that "exceeds a 7.5% increase from the employee's current rate."

About 65 employees promoted under the old rules dating back to January 25, 2022, received retroactive pay to be made whole under the new rules.

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- Work continues on the idea of trainer pay for Merit members who are taking on extra responsibilities in their day-to-day duties to help train new employees.

- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed to address the Juneteenth holiday. Just prior to the holiday, the County announced

employees would be getting Juneteenth off for the 2023 calendar year. This required the negotiating team to convene and – on an abbreviated timeline – work through all the MOUs that went with each contract.

- The negotiating team dealt with another quick turnaround change when the announcement was made near the end of 2023 that the pay scales

of all contracts were being adjusted. Because of the short timeline imposed by the County, the negotiating team opted not to have a large-scale vote on whether members wanted to have a bump in pay.

Current members of the negotiating team are: Denise Allan, Sasha Lehto, Kim Hoffmockel, John Sundel, Amy Sylvester, Dylan Otto, Matt Farden, and Anja Hogan