

MEMBER UPDATE

Health Insurance Committee

The latest updates

BY MINDY KUHL

When we elect our officers and committee members, we entrust them with large levels of responsibility and trust that they have integrity. There couldn't be anyone better in positions to look out for the worker's best interests, regarding health insurance, than Krista Shopp (Basic) and Sasha Lehto (Merit).

I spoke with Sasha Lehto on August 7th to hear the latest in our health insurance. Time and time again, I hear Sasha talk about the county's "Cadillac" health insurance coverage. She plans on continuing to fight so that we can maintain elite coverage, despite battling budget concerns.



Right now, to be transparent, our health insurance fund has about a 1 million dollar a week deficit. At this rate, it is not sustainable to do nothing. Sasha and Krista have been working on solutions that have our best interests in mind.

Right now, the plan is that our health insurance premiums will increase by 15 percent in January 2027. To help soften the blow of this increase, Sasha and Krista fought for the option to have the health insurance payments split between two paychecks. If you want to do this option, there will be more information coming out around open enrollment time (November 2026).

Sasha and Krista also plan on arranged meeting sessions, to allow members to talk to them about health insurance concerns, offer suggestions on ways to save money on health insurance costs, and hear more about upcoming changes. Sasha shared during the interview that there are a lot of things our health

insurance offers, that our members simply don't know about.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE?

Sasha also wanted me to add that if anyone ever wants to talk to her about anything health insurance related, she is just a phone call away. **218-969-5812. Stay tuned for more!**

LEGISLATIVE NEWS

Update on Use of Social Work Titles by County Agency Employees

H.F. 3454

BY MINDY KUHL

There has been some information shared, which has caused some worry, regarding a bill that has passed this last session. AFSCME has fought the passing of this bill for several years, but the fight has been lost. The reason for the opposition was concern that there is a lack of social workers in rural areas. It also leaves potential for lower pay scales for those without a degree or license but doing the same work. The negotiation team still needs to meet with HR to discuss the title for those who do not qualify for the title of "social worker." But more importantly, ensure that we all get the same pay, for doing the same work.

So more to come on this as well.



MN Legislature officially adjourned the 2026 regular legislative session on May 18, 2026.

I (Mindy Kuhl) did check into the Minnesota Merit System Career page, to see if there is anything on it regarding this new bill passing. They added the

following information to their job opportunity descriptions:

*"The **Case Manager - Bachelor's** job classification has been added to the Minnesota Merit System classifications. Some county agencies covered under the Minnesota Merit Systems will start using the new Case Manager title. This change is required because of a 2026 law that ends the long-standing county exemption allowing the "social worker" title to be used for jobs that do not require a social work degree. If you would like to be on the eligible list for the new **Case Manager - Bachelor's** title you will need to apply to the **Case Manager - Bachelor's (962-OC)** posting. We expect most counties to transition to this new classification over the next few months."*

In a nutshell, this bill prohibits an individual from being hired by a county agency on or after July 1, 2027, and providing social work services from using titles that include "social work" or "social worker," unless the individual meets certain requirements. MN House Research Bill Summary included the following additional information:

1. City, county, and state social workers.

Amends statute 148E.065, subd. 4a. Under current law, county agency social workers are not required to be licensed as social workers. A new para. (b) provides that an individual hired by a county agency on or after July 1, 2027, and providing social work services cannot use a title that includes "social work" or "social worker," unless the individual:

- Holds a baccalaureate degree or graduate degree in social work; or
- Is licensed under chapter 148E as a social worker.

2. Representations.

Amends statute 148E.195, subd. 2a. Requires a county employee to meet the requirements in section 1 of this bill, or hold a social worker license, in order to use a title that includes "social work" or "social worker."

3. Use of titles.

Amends statute 148E.280. Requires a county employee to meet the requirements in section 1 of

this bill, or hold a social worker license, in order to use a title that includes "social work" or "social worker."

HEALTH & SAFETY

Wildfire Smoke Update

The wildfire is still burning. As we've seen in previous years, these fires may continue for some time. We have already raised some issues with the Employer and wanted to share the information we have at this time:

Smoke Sensitivity: If you are sensitive to smoke exposure, mobile work agreements may be an option in many cases. If you believe this is needed, please discuss it with your supervisor.

Sick Leave and Accommodations: Sick leave remains available for those experiencing respiratory issues. If you need longer-term accommodation, please communicate with your supervisor as well.

N95 Masks: The Employer is distributing N95 masks. If you need one, please let your supervisor know so your request can be communicated.

Below is a good website to check on the fire status and to see if the area you live in is in a Ready, Set, or Go status.

<https://sheriff-slcgis.hub.arcgis.com>



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Labor Day Picnic

Monday, September 7 • 12 PM - 4 PM

Duluth Location — Bayfront Festival Park

Virginia Location — Olcott Park

Live Music, Political Speakers, Kids Activities, Raffle, Food

BMOC Meet & Greet

(flyers to come)

Virginia GSC — September 16 • 10 AM - 12 PM

Duluth GSC — September 23 • 10 AM - 12 PM

Hibbing GSC — September 30 • 10 AM - 12 PM

Scattered Sites — TBD

AFSCME LOCAL 66 | www.afscme66.org

General Meeting: the 3rd Tuesday of each month — attend via Zoom or come to the Cotton Office.
9165 Hwy 53, Cotton, MN 55724