



## NEWS RELEASE

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# State employee union members rally for respect; demand pandemic pay

*Columbus, Ohio* – Today, hundreds of members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA) were joined by AFSCME International President Lee Saunders, U.S. Congressman Tim Ryan and other labor supporters in a Rally for Respect at the Ohio Statehouse. With growing concerns that the sacrifices of Ohio's public employees are being quickly forgotten as the pandemic shifts, OCSEA union members wanted to remind everyone that they are still working hard for Ohio.

The union that represents 27,000 state employees said decision-makers throughout state and local government are turning a blind eye to those sacrifices. A recent decision by an arbitrator to side with management claiming the pandemic was not an emergency, so emergency pay wasn't warranted for state employee union members, was a slap in the face to Ohio's essential public employees.

Throughout the pandemic, public employees continued to go to work inspecting and regulating the private and public sector, taking care of the most vulnerable, processing unemployment claims, keeping Ohio's communities and workers safe and making sure the infrastructure of the state remained intact.

“Our members showed up. They were professional and effective. Every day they walked into settings that would potentially get them sick, get their families sick or... worse,” said OCSEA President Chris Mabe to the crowd. “To say this wasn't an emergency is absolutely ridiculous,” he said.

OCSEA members are calling on the DeWine administration to dig deeper into the American Rescue Plan funds and state revenue to help recruit and retain public employees across numerous state agencies and local governments and to stand up for these everyday heroes by paying them emergency pay.

“The State is in better shape today with respect to the state budget than it has been in a long time. And that's thanks to the American Rescue Plan money,” said Mabe. Mabe said the DeWine administration recently paid the entire Capital Improvement Budget in cash and without bonds for the first time in its history. In fact, the Governor just this week said he was asking for ideas about how to spend \$1.9 billion dollars in CARES and American Rescue Plan funds, explained Mabe.

“Well, we’ve got 27,000 ideas for you,” responded Mabe. “Invest in the people that kept the state alive and provided essential services during the pandemic,” he said, referring to OCSEA’s union membership of 27,000 employees.

Mabe was joined by AFSCME’s International President Lee Saunders who reiterated the sacrifices Ohio public employees made during the pandemic. “Day after day, week after week, OCSEA members kept this state running. They were understaffed to begin with, even before the pandemic. But then they picked up the slack when there was a flood of resignations and retirements, sometimes working 16 hours a day. Many stayed in hotels, so that they could keep working without infecting their families,” said Saunders at the rally.

Brian Miller, a Correction Officer at Marion Correctional Institution told rally-goers the prison where he works was “ground zero” for COVID-19. “We were the first facility to report an infection. We were the first to bring in the National Guard. And we were the first one to lose an officer,” said Miller, referring to his colleague, John Dawson, who died from COVID, the first Correction Officer to succumb to the infection.

Other speakers at the event included AFL-CIO President Tim Burga; CWA Toledo local 4319 President Erika White; Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro; and Congressman Tim Ryan. The crowd was also joined by supporters on both sides of the aisle including Senate Minority Kenny Yuko and State Representative Jay Edwards.

Congressman Tim Ryan rounded out the event with a call for union members to rise up and demand respect. “We’re talking about respect. Dignity. Honoring the work that nobody else wants to do,” said the Congressman. “It’s about respect. And we need to bring that respect back to America. This country was built on the great American middle-class workers. It’s time to give them the respect they deserve,” he concluded.

*OCSEA represents approximately 27,000 state employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).*

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