

Council 2 Organizes to Help Save Tacoma-Pierce County Public Health Department

Local public health departments have played an irreplaceable role throughout the pandemic – providing information, supplies, and support, coordinating COVID response, and now helping lead efforts to distribute the vaccines that are key to returning life to some sense of normalcy.

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department has been essential to keeping communities safe in Washington’s second-most populated county. Despite Pierce County’s large size, the Public Health Department has helped keep cases down, averaging just 13 per 100,000 people in the last week prior to publication. Council 2 is proud to have 125 members who are public health workers in this department.

Last year, as the pandemic raged, Council 2 and Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department management came to an unusually quick agreement on a new two-year contract. Management recognized the sacrifices made daily by their employees, and was willing to agree to a strong contract without a drawn out negotiation.

But before workers and Council 2 members could fully appreciate their new deal, their livelihoods – and the region’s public health – were threatened. The Pierce County Council surprisingly proposed a new resolution that would dissolve and eliminate the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, replacing it with a ‘Pierce County Health Department’ with a board consisting of the members of the County Council.

The existing department benefits

from more than just strong collaboration between levels of government – it also receives robust funding from the city of Tacoma – more than \$1.15 million. Moving forward with this effort would have defunded public health services at a time where they’ve never been more urgent in the history of the 38-year-old department.

With a 4-3 Republican-supported majority on the Council – the ordinance dissolving the public health department looked destined to pass – potentially putting the region’s health at risk and undercutting Council 2 members’ new contract agreement for improved wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions.

So Council 2, its members, other local unions, and the community got to work. Together, they organized support across the county and made their voices heard through official communications, emails and calls to councilmembers, as well as a protest on December 8th outside the County City Building in Tacoma – a show of force that demonstrated the strength of opposition against the measure, including from management and in the form of labor solidarity.

The dissolution ordinance still appeared to have the votes to pass, but Governor Jay Inslee took the remarkable step of issuing a proclamation stopping the termination of combined local health department operations until the pandemic subsided.

“This pause will allow public health employees to focus their energies on the most challenging chapter yet in

our pandemic response,” Inslee said at the time. “They cannot be frustrated in their work by extraneous debate.”

Similarly, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Director of Health Dr. Anthony Chen called the measure “an unfortunate distraction” from their pandemic response efforts.

In response, the Pierce County Council did not drop the resolution – instead, they modified it to still dissolve the operation, but for it to take effect after the pandemic ended, a brazen attempt to bypass the Governor’s order. As the vote for the ordinance approached, all signs pointed to it passing, but Council 2 and the department staff kept up their efforts.

At a hearing for the ordinance, Council 2 Assistant Director for Legislative Affairs Abbie Zulock said, “This kind of legislation is NOT how we thank these dedicated public servants for their service throughout this historic pandemic. The instability a decision like this would create for these workers in the middle of a pandemic is demoralizing and disrespectful.”

Recalling how she has relied on the health department for fast responses and support for other Pierce County workers with COVID questions or exposure, Zulock added, “Pierce County’s staff are safer because of the AFSCME Local 120 workers at the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. An attempt to defund this agency...is a disgraceful move that will harm not only your constituents, but the workers who serve

those constituents.”

Zulock wasn’t alone – others from across the county testified in opposition to the misguided and poorly timed proposal, making clear the impact that the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department has on its residents and the risk posed by its dissolution.

This testimony clearly made an impact, because when the time came for the vote, Councilmember Pam Roach (R-Summer), the sponsor of the ordinance, voted down her own legislation in what one media organization called a “shocking reversal.” Roach was greeted with gratitude because she listened to her constituents, understood their opposition, and made the right vote.

This experience is further evidence of the power workers have when they unite, organize, and fight for what they believe in. Council 2 will always stand with its members, because, by working together in unison, this team makes progress in contracts, in workplaces, and in the community.

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ities, but should go away in a few days. Common side effects include pain or swelling at the injection site, fever, chills, tiredness and headaches. Contact your doctor if the redness or tenderness where you get the shot increases after 24 hours, or if your side effects persist after a few days.

If you have more questions about the vaccine, visit the Washington State Department of Health website: doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/Vaccine.



Your Union Urges You to Get Informed and Get Vaccinated!

As union members, we stand together not only for fair wages and benefits, but also to protect each other from workplace hazards. Ultimately, our goal is to have happy, healthy lives for ourselves and our families.

The vaccine can save lives and help to end the pandemic, but only if we get vaccinated. It is only through high vaccine utilization that we will beat this virus now and in the future. Otherwise, the coronavirus will continue to spread and we will continue to put our loved ones, co-workers, and jobs at risk.

What is the vaccine? The coronavirus vaccine is an mRNA vaccine, the kind that triggers your body’s cells to make proteins that build immunity to the coronavirus. Most other types of vaccines use weakened components of the disease-causing pathogen itself to stimulate an immune response, but not this vaccine. In other words, there is no coronavirus in this vaccine.

How did the vaccine get approved so quickly? Is it safe? Normally, vaccine production starts after they are tested for safety and effectiveness. In this case, drug companies were encouraged to start production while the testing was still underway. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines underwent the usual rigorous testing, review and approval process to establish their safety and effectiveness. This included clinical trials in the U.S. and other countries in which nearly 75,000 volunteers were vaccinated. Also, Washington joined other Western states in doing an additional expert review of these clinical trials. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were then approved as safe and effective.

What are the side effects? Side effects are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activ-

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One Year Into COVID-19, Council 2 Healthcare Workers Show Resilience and Unity

MASON COUNTY – Only a small number of Council 2 members work in hospitals and the healthcare field – but for those workers, the last year has been a challenge unlike any before.

While everyone has had to make sacrifices and adjust to new working conditions and safety precautions, healthcare workers at the Mason Health hospital have dealt with all of the above while at the same time serving on the frontlines against the virus that has turned life upside down across the nation.

Like workplaces around the country, as the virus first took hold, the hospital adopted safety precautions – familiar and unfamiliar. Though many healthcare workers are already used to wearing protective gear, the additional precautions were a new and challenging intrusion – defined by uncertainty in the pandemic’s early days.

“Everybody was worried of the unknown,” said Mary Robillard, an environmental services technician tasked with disinfecting spaces throughout Mason Health.

As scientists have learned more about the virus, Mason Health’s safety precautions have become refined. Break times are adjusted so breakroom gatherings meet social distancing guidance, robust testing is available, extra ventilation was added, hospital visitors are limited, and all staff wear masks and other personal protective equipment.

Malla Hayek, Vice President of Local 1504 and a dietary aide who helps prepare food and serve it to patients, called the safety protocols a “culture shock” that are important for protecting everyone’s health and safety, but not without their own relatable challenges.

Hayek, who herself lives with an immunocompromised person, is grateful for the caution and widespread, consistent adoption of safety measures that keep individuals and community safe, while acknowledging the shared sacrifice can be difficult.

“When you’re around food, trying to wear a pair of goggles and a face shield

while you’re cooking – it’s difficult!” said Hayek. “Having to wear a mask constantly, when some of us, like me, I kind of get a little claustrophobic,” adding that “trying to find a mask that works – and that I can work in – has been interesting.”

One of the pandemic’s most troublesome realities has been a loss of community, as gatherings are restricted and meeting places closed. That’s true too at Mason Health, where hospital visitors and members of the community, often elderly, would frequent the dining hall for a good, affordable meal. Hayek says many consider Mason Health’s salad bar the best in town.

“That was kinda the saddest part for me, losing those people and that interaction with the day-to-day ‘Joe Blow’s,’” said Hayek. “The community aspect being lost was kind of sad. I really look forward to the day where that comes back. I hope it does.”

As the pandemic has worn on, staff have continued helping patients and saving lives. Members point to the strong collaboration between administration, management, and Council 2 – coming together during a crisis to put workers first and prioritize staff support.

The administration has been greatly appreciative of its staff, serving as helpful partners and facilitators – keeping workers up to date with the latest information from the CDC, visiting Zoom staff meetings, and being regularly available for questions and support.

While many hospitals nationwide were thrown into chaos as the pandemic set in, Mason Health staff say their hospital was well prepared and very different from horror stories seen on the news and online. The hospital also ensured that workers never ran out or had to reuse disposable PPE, especially critical with supply shortages nationwide.

“I have been very pleased with the way Mason Health has handled the whole last year,” said Robillard. “They’ve just been really working with us well.”

She added, “They really cared about their employees, as a facility, to do what they had to do to make sure that people are being safe.”

Both Robillard and Hayek speak highly of Council 2, calling their representative Aaron Cole “exceptional.” Even though Mason Health’s current COVID restrictions mean Cole isn’t allowed inside the hospital, he has been available and accessible – frequently checking in, visiting outside when needed, and even dropping off masks featuring the Council 2 logo.

Council 2 has kept up quarterly meetings, and made sure workers are getting their rightful overtime, vacation time, wages, and more. Healthcare workers have felt empowered given strong support from their Union and because they have been treated by administration and management with the same respect given to doctors and nurses.

Most important, workers say, has been the unity shown between staff – as compassion and understanding has outweighed fear and despair. “Even with COVID, keeping a united front is so important right now – supporting each other. I think that’s one thing with our Local that we do. In our Union, most of us, we’re pretty tight,” said Hayek.

Facing continued uncertainty, Robillard says, “when everyone supports each other, it kind of eases that. You realize, you’re not the only one with that fear – everyone did come together...We’ve all been a great team.”

As the vaccine has become available to healthcare workers, many have accepted and received their second dose, a beacon of hope and a sign brighter days are ahead.

No doubt, the last year of the pandemic has been challenging – for workers, community members, friends, and families. Council 2’s healthcare workers have dealt with heightened versions of these same challenges every day – restrictive but necessary safety precautions, uncertainty, loss of community. Yet, they continue on and persevere – an inspiration for all.

“Even when you’re social distanc-

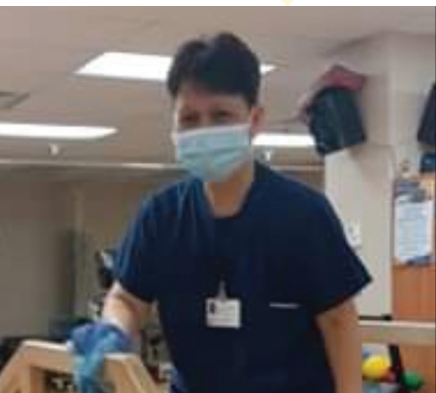
ing, you can still be a family, still be friends, still keep that unity,” said Hayek. “I think we need that much for our Local, our nation, our families – keeping close is so important. And I think we’re doing that. I truly do.”



Jennifer Price and Marie Carpenter, Culinary and Nutrition



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Letter from the President

CHRIS DUGOVICH

We provide better Dental coverage at a lower cost than Delta!

Council 2 offers a most cost-effective service to its members, but it seems to be well hidden.

The State Council operates a non-profit insurance trust through the trusteeship of its three elected officers – Vice-President Ron Fredin, Secretary-Treasurer Kathleen Etheredge and me. The trust offers, on a group basis, 12 dental plans, a vision plan, two long-term disability plans and two levels of term life insurance. With our non-profit status and limited administration cost these benefits have continued to improve.

The Trust, created in the late 60s, was, and still is, intended to provide the best benefits to members on a bargaining unit basis at the lowest possible cost. Naturally, more participants in the plan will reduce the cost — giving all participants the greatest benefit for their dollars.

Unlike other Insurance Benefits Plans, our Trust covers 100% of the cost of preventive care on most plans (exams, cleaning, etc.).

Dental

Our 12 different dental plans offer benefit options to match your employer's ability to pay. With the exception of Plan 10, 12 and 13, our payments per individual procedure are a set amount with frequent upgrades. Plan 10, 12 and 13 pay benefits on a usual, reasonable and customary basis rather than a scheduled payment. In addition to the 100% preventive care for Plan 10, 12 and 13, these plans pay between 90% - 100% for basic services, and between 50% - 80% for major services and 50% of orthodontia up to \$5,000.

These benefits would be paid no matter the actual cost, including the regular dental calendar-year maximum of \$2,000.

Orthodontia: It is important to note that our plans 4 through 13 (with the exception of Plan 6) provide orthodontia coverage. Most outside plans do not.

Vision

Vision insurance is provided through Vision Services Plan. It covers lenses, frames, lens enhancements, and an amount toward contacts. Every 12 months the plan covers a "Well Vision Exam" and the benefits themselves are provided through an extensive list of optometrists and opticians throughout the state.

Disability

Long-term disability insurance is one benefit that really has not yet come to the forefront, although it's extremely important. Generally, this coverage kicks in for an illness or injury that keeps you from the ability to work. It's salary insurance!

Although the State's Labor and Industries Insurance offers you coverage for an on-the-job injury, the trust's disability insurance augments this coverage and will pay in many instances when the state plan will not. It also would cover you for either an illness or injury off the job. The trust offers two plans. Plan I requires a 90-day, and Plan II a 180-day, waiting period after injury or illness.

Life/AD&D Insurance

We offer two levels of coverage: \$10,000 and \$100,000. The premium is competitive at the following rates per member per month: \$4.58 for \$10,000, and \$35.43 for \$100,000.

How Does My Local Participate?

Two ways! The first is to make your choice of the coverages as a proposal during your next set of contract negotiations and gain the agreement of the employer to pay the premium. Additionally, by a simple majority vote of your local membership you can participate in the plan. Keep in mind that all members of your local must participate whether or not they voted for the plan, and you will need to gain your employer's agreement to deduct the premium from your pay. If your local is interested in pursuing these coverages or you need additional information, ask your Staff Representative or call Council 2.

Council 2's Online Classes Engage New Local Leaders and Excite Members



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Council 2 regularly held training classes where twenty to thirty members at a time could learn more about how to get involved in their local Union and become shop stewards. These in-person, full day trainings were monumental for establishing new generations of leadership and increasing on-the-ground support for Council 2 members.

But just like schools, colleges, and other events moved online following the outset of the pandemic, Council 2 also had to adapt to the new normal in order to continue bringing on shop stewards and supporting members who hope to get more involved with their local union. To do so, trainings have shifted from one full day in-person event to short multiple, topic-specific online classes.

"The virtual steward training classes have been well attended by members from all around the state," said Debra Kidney, Council 2 Education Coordinator. "They are designed for both new and experienced members with time to both get information and ask questions."

So far, the Union has hosted eleven classes, all strongly attended with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Training topics range from *Introduction to Being a Steward* to other related areas, such as *Knowing Your Contract*, *Identifying & Filing a Grievance*, *Investigatory Meetings*, and *How to Sign Up New Members*.

This more accessible format has broadened the segment of membership joining classes. Members attending the new online trainings cite the subject matter, quality of training, and the new format's flexibility – embracing the convenience of learning from home in short sections, as for many, traveling and committing to an entire day of class pre-pandemic was not possible.

Ben O'Leary, Vice President of Local 618CD in Thurston County, said the shop steward training, "provided a great orientation and overview on the duties of shop stewards, a basic understanding of the grievance process and overview on Weingarten Rights."

O'Leary said, as a member of his local's executive board, "the most valuable part was the overview of collective bargaining agreements and key details shop stewards need to know from them." He added, "The training was easy to attend via Zoom. Debra and Aaron from Council 2 provided a lot of great insight on what the roles and responsibilities of a shop steward are. There was plenty of time to ask questions and interact with others attending the class."

The classes serve as a complement to AFSCME's free college program, which is also entirely online. Members can earn an Associate's or Bachelor's degree for free as part of their membership with Council 2. (Members interested in the free college program can learn more and enroll at FreeCollege.AFSCME.org.)

The trainings' popularity means the classes are in high demand, and there are limited spots available for upcoming classes. Kidney said, "The classes are full so if you are signed up and are unable to come, please let us know 24 hours before the class so we can add in members on our waiting list."

Because the classes have been such a success, Kidney added they will be posting a new set of running from April through June. Going forward and after the pandemic's end, Council 2 Representative and Director of Staff Services Miguel Morga says Council 2 will look for opportunities to maintain and expand online trainings, in conjunction with the return of in person classes.

"I think we should look at how we supplement and have some [classes] that are all day, because that's easier for some people to accommodate, continued with these types of shorter classes. That allows us to get a full range of members who are interested in being leaders and stewards in their local," said Morga.

Even in these challenging and uncertain times, Council 2 is continuing to innovate in order to support its leadership and members. "Council 2 has done a great job adapting to changes that needed to be made during the pandemic and offering virtual trainings to help members gain the necessary knowledge and tools needed to become great shop stewards," said O'Leary.

To learn more or sign up, visit: Council2.com/Events/Virtual-Trainings.

Timely Decision to Join Council 2 Helps City of Issaquah Workers During Pandemic

In 2019, a diverse group of City of Issaquah workers, in an independent association, had a decision to make. Facing a new contract negotiation, they determined it could be in their best interest to affiliate with a union who would bring professional representation and collective bargaining expertise.

They took meetings and pitches from labor organizations, as well as a law firm that offered negotiation assistance for a retainer. Council 2 made a strong impression – the most cost-effective option, the best benefits, professional representatives, and a record of representing city workers in similar situations. The workers voted overwhelmingly to join Council 2.

After signing their union cards, preparations began for contract negotiations in early 2020. Before any real progress, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, adding new uncertainty to negotiations. The pandemic moved discussions to a new venue – Zoom. That wasn't its only effect.

As the city reviewed its budget projections and recognized the potential for a revenue shortfall, Council 2 adjusted its negotiation priorities. Drawing on past contracts, Council 2 negotiated a memorandum of understanding for how layoffs and furloughs would work to protect as many jobs as possible.

Without union representation, that would have been "a tough sled" said Jason Bond, President, Local 21-IS. He added that Council 2 and staff were "immensely helpful. I don't even want to think about where we would be without it."

In June, the two sides agreed to a three-year contract, formalizing the local's first collective bargaining agreement since joining Council 2. At the end of the year, the city found funds left in its budget, allowing Issaquah to pay back furloughs through a lump sum end-of-year payment.

Representatives from Council 2 will always work side-by-side with members to fight for their needs and a fair contract with good wages, benefits, and protections. "We're just grateful for the support, it's nice to be part of AFSCME," said Bond.

For the City of Issaquah workers, the timing of affiliating with Council 2 couldn't have been better. While no one can predict the occurrence of a budget shortfall or a once-in-a-century pandemic, workers should know the best protection for their job comes from joining a union.

Governor Looks to Council 2 Recommendations to Help Safely Reopen Libraries

Last year, Governor Jay Inslee's office began rolling out phased reopening plans, including for libraries. In the early plans, library staff and Council 2 recognized guidelines were missing worker perspectives and needed protections for collective bargaining agreements.

So Council 2 reached out to the Governor's office, offering to provide insight into the planning, providing critical feedback informed by on-the-ground experience. The Governor's staff were receptive, and by working with Council 2 members and representatives have helped chart a safe path forward for library reopening.

Important input came from members of the Pierce County Library system. They were excited to participate, feeling it was important to contribute their ideas and viewpoints with their employers eager to open local branches.

"I am deeply grateful and appreciative of Governor Inslee and his office for their collaboration and support for library workers during this time," said Aisha Womack, President of Local 3787, Pierce County Libraries. "We work in a very unique workplace and their regard for our safety has been met with openness and heart."

One important provision is that "work that can be done remotely should be done remotely." With case numbers still in flux and social distancing guidelines in place, workers should be able to stay home if their work doesn't require them inside the branch. Different library branches and systems have advocated for different levels of in-person work, and setting this clear standard helps keep staff safe and focused on their work.

Another important request from Council 2 was for "clear, enforceable, and consistent" guidance for determining when libraries are safe to open to the public. This is important for making sure there is a thoughtful process behind reopening, rather than the decision being made on a whim. Council 2 has also asked for clarity around rights to access PPE, safe workplace priorities, and other forms of employer support.

These recommendations and requests will ensure libraries open as soon and as safely as possible. Council 2 is proud to have a strong relationship with the Governor's Office, and with many other elected leaders, which allows this kind of collaboration and effective advocacy for city and county workers across the state.

Key Provisions of the American Rescue Plan

This month, Congress passed President Biden's American Rescue Plan – one of the boldest pieces of legislation and recovery efforts in the country's history. Some of the plan's most impactful elements include:

- \$360 billion in aid to state and local governments, territories, and tribes. Approximately \$7 billion in stimulus money will go to the State of Washington and local municipalities
- \$170 billion to reopen schools safely
- \$100 billion to support transit systems and workers
- \$39 billion to supplement current child care funds
- \$1400 Recovery Rebate Checks to Individuals – with phaseout starting at incomes of \$75,000 for single filers, and \$150,000 for joint filers
- Increasing the Child Care Tax Credit, enhancing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and expanding the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit
- Increased funds for COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccinations
- Expanding Paycheck Protection Program to Unions
- \$200 million to protect worker safety
- \$200 million for states to support local libraries
- Support to strengthen at-risk pensions
- \$7 billion towards broadband
- Expanding the Affordable Care Act and subsidizing COBRA premiums
- Improving Behavioral Health Services
- Extension of Unemployment Benefits
- Strengthening rental housing assistance, paid leave, TANF and SNAP benefits

You can learn more at WhiteHouse.gov/American-Rescue-Plan.

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