



# Trenton Report

Advocating for better schools; higher education and workers rights

Oct. 2012

## Recent Legislative News

### Higher Education Restructuring

AFTNJ led a coalition of doctors, nurses, professors and all levels of higher education workers affected by legislation to merge UMDNJ into Rutgers. Because of member advocacy, outstanding governance issues in South Jersey were resolved in a way that preserves the independence and integrity of Rutgers and its Camden and Newark campuses, as well as Rowan University.

This legislation should be viewed as a first step towards strengthening higher education in New Jersey, said AFTNJ Political Director Seth Anderson-Oberman. "The successful implementation of this legislation is still dependent on adequate state support for higher education and critical healthcare facilities for New Jersey residents."

### TEACH NJ (Tenure)

AFTNJ President Donna M. Chiera applauded authors of the new tenure bill, particularly Sen. Teresa Ruiz, for working with a broad range of individuals and organizations, including AFTNJ, that were committed to ensuring that this legislation remained focused on improving teaching and learning in our schools.

Chiera had in-depth, ongoing discussions with Sen. Ruiz, that focused on ensuring teachers had a voice in advocating for high professional standards and the supports needed to meet those standards. "Provisions in this legislation allow for access to professional development and mentorship so that ineffective teachers can become effective teachers, and effective teachers can become master teachers—making it possible for all our students to be taught by a master teacher," said Chiera.

## What could be coming

### Sick Leave Compensation Threatened

Governor Chris Christie has made the elimination of compensation for unused sick leave a major policy priority and is accusing Democrats of giving away taxpayer money on so-called "boat payments." While the Governor wants to completely eliminate these payments, the Legislature has primarily debated capping future payments to retiring employees.

Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt has been the most influential legislator on sick leave compensation and her bills have attracted the most support. Assemblywoman Lampitt introduced two bills (A-1179 & A-2489) concerning sick leave payouts for current and future employees. A-1179 pertains to unionized employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and would end additional cash accruals upon retirement. The bill allows current employees to keep what they have accumulated up to the date the bill is signed into law. Going forward, the bill would allow unions to bargain up to \$7,500 in unused sick leave toward the employee's share of post-retirement health care costs. A-2489 is also a sick leave compensation bill, but only pertains to non-union workers. This bill also ends future accruals for current employees, but allows them to keep what they have accrued to date, and does not allow them to bargain for health care cost reductions in the future. Both bills were released from committee in the Assembly.

AFTNJ supports addressing compensation for unused sick leave through collective bargaining.

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Trenton Report is published by the American Federation of Teachers New Jersey. Back issues and detailed links online at [www.aftnj.org/report](http://www.aftnj.org/report)

## Support for Public Workers



*AFTNJ members and NJ AFL-CIO President Charles Wowkanech at Oct. 3 rally for public workers in Trenton.*

At the Statehouse rally, U.S. Sen. Lautenberg called on the state to invest in public services. The Senator referred to a NJ Policy Perspectives report that identified the 61,200 public-sector job losses since Christie took office as part of the drag on the state's economy.

## Senate Higher Education Hearing

AFTNJ members from William Paterson University, Rutgers, Rowan and Camden County College testified in a special hearing for the newly convened Senate Higher Education committee on Sept. 24 in Trenton. The hearing, chaired by Sen. Sandra Cunningham heard from AFTNJ faculty members about promoting student success, the role of higher education in economic development and a call for a greater state role in oversight of colleges and universities.

Presenters called for:

- Greater support services for students,
- Fair treatment of adjunct faculty, and
- Better funding for higher education.

The full presentations from AFTNJ members are posted online at [www.aftnj.org/report](http://www.aftnj.org/report).

## What could be coming (continued)

### Shared Services Bill Concerns

Senate President Steve Sweeney and others have introduced S-2, legislation designed to encourage consolidation and promote shared services among local governments. The legislation would empower the state to conduct studies of local governments and make recommendations on any potential savings that could be realized through consolidating operations or sharing services across governments or departments. The local entities could be subject to a loss of state aid if they do not implement these cost-saving plans.

Worryingly for public sector workers, the legislation includes a provision that would temporarily suspend civil service for 12 months in jurisdictions seeking to share services, as the legislation's sponsors somehow blame civil service laws for blocking their plans. So the bill allows local governments to override collective bargaining agreements as they pertain to layoffs, seniority, bumping rights and other rules while shared service agreements between local governments are being implemented.

While AFTNJ supports the bill's intent to reduce property taxes through consolidation and shared services, provisions that suspend civil service and negatively impact contracts should be excluded. After passing the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee, the bill is currently awaiting a vote in the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and the Assembly Housing and Local Government Committee.

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