



Saint Louis County

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NEWS RELEASE

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County agrees to AFSCME request regarding sick leave

St. Louis County negotiators have notified AFSCME representatives and the state mediator that they will accept the union's offer regarding maximum sick leave accumulation and payout upon retirement. Employees in the County's two largest bargaining units, the Civil Service and Merit System Basic Units, filed an intent-to-strike notice last week and could walk off the job as early as this Friday.

"Our position has always been that we want to protect our current employees by not taking away benefits they've negotiated for in the past," said County Administrator Kevin Gray. "That said, if the union position is to reduce this benefit for current employees, we will agree to it in the spirit of compromise."

The County had proposed that current employees be allowed to keep their existing benefit – being able to accumulate up to 1,900 hours, which can be transferred into a health care savings plan upon retirement. But to address the liability this creates for taxpayers, currently estimated at \$28 million, the County proposed that future employees be allowed to accumulate 1,150 hours. AFSCME has countered with the a proposal to cap all current and future employees at 1,500 hours, with the exception that any current employees with more than 1,500 hours accumulated would be able to keep what they've earned.

"Reducing the sick leave benefit to 1,500 hours is a temporary solution to a long-term situation," Gray said. "We will accept it for now if, in fact, this is what our employees want. But it's something we will need to revisit in future negotiations."

"AFSCME has been very public in its criticism of the County for suggesting a 'two-tiered contract'. This is surprising considering they recommended this same two-tiered approach in our proposal to our employees in the Jail/911 unit, and those employees approved it." Gray added,

“Likewise, there are numerous other instances of two-tiered contracts for AFSCME units throughout the state.”

Approximately 1,000 St. Louis County employees belong to these two units. Information about the potential strike, the County’s plans to continue operations in the event of a work stoppage, and a list of examples of two-tier benefits in AFSCME-approved contracts can be read online at stlouiscountymn.gov/strike.

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