

CEUI & MEUI  
2023



# LEGISLATIVE RECAP

## **PANDEMIC PAY ARBITRATION AWARD**

The passage of the Hazard Pay arbitration award was one of our most valuable legislative wins this session. While nothing could ever truly honor the work our members did during the pandemic while putting themselves and their families at immediate risk, this small stipend was an attempt to make those members whole. If you are still awaiting a Pandemic Pay stipend you believe you are entitled to, please feel free to reach out to the Union and we will help get things straightened out.

## **Creating Pathways to State Employment**

The passage of this legislation is a necessary step towards the enactment of important pipeline partnerships between the State and various State agencies by creating a taskforce to study the need for such career pathways. Our local is ready, willing, and able to help craft any programs with the Connecticut Higher Education facilities to help move our state forward in a progressive and meaningful push to true pipeline partnerships for trades, manufacturing, and commercial driving.

## **Requiring the Comptroller to Fully Fund Unfunded Pension Liabilities for Institutions of Higher Education**

We are constantly fighting off privatization of our member's jobs, and just one of the reasons given for this – by the Board of Regents especially – is the unfunded pension liability that our higher education institutions carry. Thankfully with the election of our newest Comptroller, he made it a priority to fund this portion of our State's liability to both discourage privatization attempts as well as passing the cost of these liabilities on to students and their families through tuition hikes. This legislation passed in this year's budget and we are thrilled to be able to use this as a successful precedent when negotiating similar legislation for other state agencies.

## **Expedited State Employee Recruitment and Staffing Levels**

In the last 20 years, our state workforce has been shrunk by over 20% from layoffs, privatization, and attrition. These shocking statistics don't even account for the 7.6% decrease in Connecticut public employees (excluding the education sector) that we saw during the pandemic from July 2019 to July 2021, and the 4,500 retirements we've seen since the start of 2022. With nearly 200 vacancies in our Department of Transportation Maintainer division alone, our need for an accelerated state hiring process has never been greater. This bill provides added flexibility to hire new agency employees faster, while still protecting the rights of job applicants and existing employees. The new legislation:

- Will permit appointing authorities to immediately hire someone from any candidate list to fill that specific vacancy or one in a different job class.
- Permits job openings to be posted on a continuous basis
- Simplifies transfer language that is also in collective bargaining agreements.

## **Defeated Legislation**

Sometimes it's just as important to make sure that bad bills DON'T get passed as it is to ensure that the good bill DO get passed. H.B. 5464 threatened to inform other municipalities and states of accused wrongdoing of a state or municipal employee that resigned before finality of the complaint against them. We saw this as a gross state overreach, and with help from members willing to testify against this bill we were able to ensure it never made it to a vote.

# PARAEDUCATORS

We continue to fight for our paraeducators at the legislative level. While we weren't able to get everything we wanted this time around, we saw powerful participation by our paraeducator members at the Capitol during the public hearing process, which led to some significant wins. Legislation passed this year:

- Allows paraeducators, with a supervisor, to review the educational program developed through the PPT process.
- Sec. 213 of the budget implementer establishes, through the Comptroller, a program to provide a subsidy for paraeducators who have a Health Savings Account. As we understand it, the intent of this is to provide these subsidies for one year as a bridge to a better and more sustainable healthcare plan for paraeducators.
- Sec. 214 establishes, through the Comptroller, a program to provide a subsidy for paraeducators to purchase a Silver Level plan through the exchange. This program would start with the fiscal year on July 1, 2024.
- The stipends in Secs. 213 & 214 would be available to all paras who meet certain eligibility criteria tied to the actuarial value of the health plan offered by their school district. \$5 million in each fiscal year was appropriated for the stipends, so this will all be "within available appropriations." Lobbyists, staff, and leaders for paraeducator unions have met with staff in the Comptroller's office to begin work on developing and implementing the stipend/subsidy programs.

## Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) in Schools

We continued to work on securing funding for indoor air quality improvements in our public schools. Last session, \$150 million was approved for HVAC improvements and repairs in school buildings through fiscal year '24. This year additional language was passed:

- Each local and regional BoE must provide a uniform IAQ inspection for each school building by January 1, 2024, and annually thereafter.
- Prior to January 1, 2025 and every 5 years thereafter, each local or regional BoE shall conduct a uniform inspection and evaluation of the HVAC system within each school building under its jurisdiction.
- The DPH Commissioner shall develop guidelines establishing an "optimal thermal comfort range" of 65 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit for school facilities (gymnasiums and auditoriums may have a wider range).

## Connecticut Municipal Employee

### Retirement System (CMERS) Adjustments

You have already received an email with the breakdown of the adjustments made to CMERS legislatively, and if you haven't feel free to reach out to me for those specifics. To summarize, this legislation included adjustments to minimum COLAs as well as new incentives such as increased multipliers and a new Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP).