



LOCAL 1674 in the public service

Howard Center Workers' Union: Who We Are

- Howard Center Workers' Union, AFSCME Local Union #1674, exists to build workers' power, win better pay and working conditions, and fight for better communities for Howard Center workers and clients.
- Our union's true power doesn't come from a contract, it comes from our members: our ranks are strengthened when workers join us and weakened when they do not. But if every worker joins our union, there's nothing that can keep us from winning and defending all that we deserve for our labor!
- We hold a union-wide meeting on the first Wednesday of every month, from 5:30-7PM on Zoom. Link details are sent out a few days beforehand in a mass email. Workers within specific sites or programs often host their own shop meetings as well. If you would like to learn how to do that, we would love to help you.

What difference does a union make?

At a union workplace...

Your wages, benefits, and working conditions are protected by a legal contract.

The contract spells out how much everyone earns.

The union negotiates raises for everyone. The members vote on the settlement. If they think that is not a fair settlement, they can vote it down.

If you are disciplined for something you didn't do, the union will defend you.

If you don't like something at your workplace, you can work through the Union and together with other workers to change it.

At a non-union workplace...

Management can change wages, benefits, and working conditions whenever they want. A worker can be fired for no reason.

Nobody knows how much anyone else earns. When management tells you your wages, you are told not to tell the other workers.

If you want a raise, you have to beg for it or kiss up to the boss.

If you are disciplined for something you didn't do, you are on your own.

If you don't like something at work, you can quit.

Never forget the 3 simple ways to CYA:

1. **Obey now, grieve later:** If a superior tells you to do something that blatantly violates the contract, don't refuse unless there is a serious and imminent safety risk. You can object to their instructions, but if you do, make sure you clearly express your intent to comply despite objection. *After* you've completed the task in question, grieve it.
2. **Never do alone what you can do collectively:** A group grievance is always better than an individual grievance. Same goes for pretty much everything else at work. Never waste an opportunity to build solidarity, agitate, and organize.
3. **Remember your right to a union rep:** If a superior is asking you questions that seemed designed to get you into hot water, invoke your right to union representation: *"If this discussion could in any way lead to my*

being disciplined or terminated, then I respectfully request that a union representative be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to participate in the discussion. Please do not ask me to waive this right." Then leave a voicemail or text our steward dispatch line at **(802) 391-0123**, or email **howard.union@gmail.com**, and say you need a steward. The boss will need to reschedule or wait until a union rep is available.

Answers to Common Questions

Q: What's a union steward?

A: A steward is a trained union member who defends coworkers in disciplinary proceedings and protects our contract from management overreach. Stewards also get together monthly, to strategize, and to provide support to one another. Stewards help you create a safe and dignified workplace. Contact us to learn how to become a steward!

Q: Why should I join? Don't I get the benefits of the contract even if I don't?

A: Yes, which is actually one of the reasons you really should join. Our members—your coworkers—are just like you: underpaid and overburdened with serious financial challenges. Still, they join and pay dues to make sure you have rights and benefits and job security. A decision not to join says to them, "Thanks for being there for me. If you ever need my help, please don't hesitate to find someone else." We don't believe any Howard worker is that sort of person. But the *real* reason to join the union is that we as workers only get the voice, respect, and job conditions we deserve when we stick together.

Q: Do I really get a tee-shirt when I join?

A: Yes. Don't forget to let someone know your tee size and the best way to get it to you.

Q: Do all members have to pay dues? How much are they?

A: Most definitely. Dues are important for a bunch of reasons (like continuing to have union jobs). But really, all of those reasons boil down to a union being about sticking together and standing up for one another as workers. Dues are how we fund the fight for something better. They are deducted per pay period based on your employment status, and will be visible in your paystub. Here's how they break down:

- If you work more than 20 hours per week, dues are \$20.30 per pay period. For 365 days, you're looking at about \$1.30 per day.
- If you work between from 13 to 20 hours per week, dues are \$15.20 per pay period.
- If you work 12 or fewer hours per week, dues are \$10.28 per pay period.

Q: Will I get in trouble if I join the union?

A: Nah. But even if you did, you'd have the whole union behind you. Sure beats getting into trouble without it!

Q: Someone told me we aren't supposed to talk about the union at work. Is that true?

A: That is almost never true. At any time or place you would be allowed to talk about your weekend plans, your pets, an ill family member, or a ballgame, you cannot be barred from also talking about the union. It is a violation of federal law to prohibit union-related discussions in situations where any other kinds of "water cooler" talk would be allowed or tolerated. If a supervisor or manager has told you not to discuss the union at some point, please reach out to us about it.

Q: What does AFSCME stand for, and can it be pronounced?

A: Some say the answers are a mystery for the ages. Or, the answers are: it stands for "American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees," and is pronounced *AFF-smee*.