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UNION UPDATE



Keep fighting for working families

Anti-worker Supreme Court decision highlights importance of member activism

By **Yvonne R. Walker**,
President, *SEIU Local 1000*

The Supreme Court issued its decision in *Harris v. Quinn*. In a 5-4 decision drafted by conservative Justice Samuel Alito, the right-wing majority of the court dealt a blow to the partnership forged between the State of Illinois and home care workers through their union, SEIU Health Care Illinois-Indiana.

While the Supreme Court did reaffirm the right of public employees such as Local 1000 members to join together and have a strong voice in a union, unfortunately they did not extend the same rights to home care workers in Illinois—the ruling prohibits the state from collecting fair share fees from any non-member home care providers.

The ruling's impact on home care and childcare providers in California remains to be seen, but we know home care workers will stay united. No court case is going to stand in the way of home care workers coming together to have a strong voice for good jobs and quality home care. We are more determined than ever that joining together in unions is the best way for home care workers to ensure quality care for the seniors and people with disabilities whom they protect.

Billionaire extremists

To be clear, this issue is not about how we collect dues or the details of home care employment. It is about extremists whose chief interest is undermining the combined strength of working families.

This case was brought by the National Right to Work Foundation—the same extreme anti-worker group that has



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twice attacked Local 1000 members in the courts and whose funders include billionaires like Charles Koch and the Walton family. It is the latest in a decades-long attack on the rights of working people that is being waged in all 50 states, and it is clear they show no signs of slowing down their efforts.

While we were not directly affected by this decision, it is also clear that the anti-worker billionaires will press on, and so must we.

It is our responsibility as members of this union to build the strength and unity to not only withstand these attacks, but create the power necessary to achieve social and economic justice for all working people.

Look no further than the home health care workers involved in this lawsuit to see the what's at stake in preserving and protecting our union voice. Prior to voting to join SEIU, Illinois home care workers were paid \$7 per hour with no benefits. They now earn nearly \$12 per hour with health care and other benefits. The union is also good for Illinois tax payers and patients.

In court filings, Illinois officials pointed out that patient care had improved because, through SEIU, the state could hire, train and retain qualified workers for home care jobs. Disabled and elderly patients benefited because they were much more likely to keep a familiar caretaker after the union negotiated higher pay and benefits.

In an eloquent dissent, Justice Elena Kagan writes that Illinois could be the “poster child” for the effectiveness of unions improving the quality of care and training for workers. “The State ... believes it has gotten a more stable workforce providing higher quality care, thereby avoiding the costs associated with institutionalization.”

Further illustrating that politics matter, this 5-4 decision was backed by the conservative, anti-worker Supreme Court majority. Our political engagement—through activism, voting and COPE donations—decides elections. The leaders we elect decide the make-up of the Supreme Court, which, in turn, could decide the future of the labor movement. We must re-balance the bench in our favor.

Politics matter

But there is a clear way to overcome and defeat these attacks on working people, and in this moment we must recommit ourselves to the grassroots organizing that harnesses the collective power of working people.

COPE, membership, and member activism are our path to victory.

To get involved in our fight to save the middle class, call the Member Resource Center at **866.471.SEIU** (7348).

Prison librarians push for reclassification

Members seek respect, improved wages and updated job specifications

The state's prison librarians, who perform some of the most complicated duties of any librarians in California, are organizing to update their nearly 40-year-old job specifications.

"Imagine a library in 1975—card catalogs but no Internet, no DVDs or CDs. Our job specifications haven't been updated since," said Robert Oldfield, a librarian and at Valley State Prison since 2000. "Our job specifications haven't been updated since 1975—while the libraries we work in have changed profoundly since that time. We are pushing for respect and recognition for the complex work that we do."

Prison librarians from all over the state met in Sacramento in June with the Bargaining Unit 3 negotiating team, and for meetings with senior education officials at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Local 1000 is pushing the state to modernize the classification and pay prison librarians for the vital work they do.

Role in rehabilitation

"There is a real sense that CDCR officials don't really understand the work that we do and we need to educate them in order move reclassification forward," Oldfield said. "Prison libraries have issues that you do not encounter when you run a neighborhood branch library. We provide inmates with a wide range of services that help their education and rehabilitation. If you are an inmate coming up on parole we are your only link to the Internet to find a job, to find a place to live to look for training programs on the outside. We've had 30,000 books checked out so far this year but that only scratches the surface of what prison librarians do."

Each of the state's 34 prisons has at least one library; most have several libraries. Inmates are usually required to sign up for library time in advance because demand is high. Due to lack of staff, many libraries have had to cut back hours of operation.

"The state is continuously advertising for librarians and senior librarians for correctional facilities," said Margaret Lirones, who has worked at the California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility in Corcoran since 2012. "There has been a chronic high vacancy and turnover rate for years. With the renewed emphasis on rehabilitation, there are new programs that cannot be implemented in some libraries because there is no staff. High turnover means that even when a great library program is in place, it must be restarted when new employees are hired, sometimes after many months. Vacancies and turnover hurt the rehabilitation process. Libraries support the education program, support literacy development, provide resources for inmates who are preparing for parole, and provide inmates with legal materials and access to the courts. Libraries that are closed for lack of staff cannot provide any of these services. Addressing the vacancy and turnover rate will make it possible for the state to move forward with library services for rehabilitation."

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Lirones said that when prison librarians also have a teaching credential, they often leave the library for the classroom where the pay is higher. Unit 3 Chair John Kern said the state rejected Local 1000's proposed changes in librarian pay in bargaining last year, but "we've put those salary proposals back on the table."

"We expect CDCR to address the problem and get the librarian vacancies filled with highly qualified staff. It's not easy to be a librarian and a correctional employee. A correctional librarian has an amazing skill set and deserves to be compensated accordingly. I'm glad to see our librarians are organizing to win."

Resource Center

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