**State Worker Issue Summaries**

**for Representative Francesca Hong**

**Introduction to State Agency Workers**

The state of Wisconsin employs around 30,000 permanent employees and several thousand “limited term employees.” These people do work ranging from monitoring our parks and natural resources, ensuring residents get aid and funds that they are entitled to, checking the quality and safety of food, working as archivists, and all sorts of administrative work to make that and all the other work possible. In short, we provide public services to the residents of Wisconsin.

While the attacks of Act 10 diminished the legal powers of public-sector unions and placed barriers to organizing, workers continue to be members of our unions and act collectively to improve our working conditions outside of collective bargaining.

**Six Key Issues for State Workers**

1. ***Protect and Expand the Civil Service System:*** We must hire state workers based on objective merit, not their political connections or privileged social identities, and we must protect them when they do their jobs. Civil Service is a key anti-corruption tool within the public sector so that the people of Wisconsin get the quality public services they deserve. The fair standards instituted under such a civil service system moreover promote racial justice within public employment.
2. ***End Exploitation of Limited-Term Employees:*** We want to stop the state’s systematic reliance on casual or “Limited Term Employees” (LTEs) to carry out state work. In many cases LTEs are long-term, career employees who are simply denied job security, equal pay, and equal benefits. Our agencies are weaker for not building in-house expertise and institutional knowledge, and instead relying on an unstable and contingent workforce to provide key services.

*Background on the abuse and exploitation of LTEs:* LTEs may work for a few hours a week, but many work 30 or 40. LTEs receive less pay than their full-time coworkers doing the same work, and LTEs do not receive paid time off for sickness, vacation, or holidays. They do not accrue sick days that can earn them money towards healthcare when they retire. Some LTEs qualify for health insurance through the state, but unstable hours can threaten that throughout the year. LTEs have no access to grievance procedures and can have their hours cut to zero on a moment’s notice, with no recourse available. While they are technically only supposed to work 1,039 hours in a year, many are given a second appointment to work another 1,039, bringing them to 40 hours per week.

We work with people who have been LTEs for 5, 10, and even 25 years. For every state holiday where the office is closed, they must choose between losing a day’s wages or working extra on all the other days. Every winter, they have to work extra nearly every week to make up for the lost wages because the offices are closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve, and New Year’s Day. When budgets are tight, as they have been this last year, LTEs across the state are the first to have hours cut, no matter their seniority.

We don’t know the number of LTEs across the state. LTEs are excluded from most employment reporting that the state puts out, making it hard to assess how long LTEs work for the state, how pay compares to “permanent” coworkers, and, especially important, makes it hard to understand the demographics of LTEs vs. state employment overall.

LTEs are also excluded from many work rules and policies. For example, in this budget Governor Evers proposed a $15/hr minimum wage for state workers. This did not include LTEs. The last two state budgets and this budget have included yearly 2% general-wage adjustments for state workers, but again this did not include LTEs. LTEs are also excluded from the pay ranges for their positions, meaning that the state can and does hire people at less than what is reported as the minimum for that work. LTEs are often performing the same or similar work as their FTE colleagues while making a third less pay.

1. ***Stop Hiring Outside Vendors To Do What State Employees Could Do More Effectively at Less Cost:*** State work is too often contracted to vendors who understand the job less, charge the state more, and sometimes even pay their workers less (with the difference going to corporate owners) – leaving the state without the staff needed to carry on when these contractors leave. Despite the claims of its defenders, this system is costly and inefficient.
2. ***$15 Minimum Wage for All State Employees,* Including *LTEs and Contract Workers.*** We cannot provide quality public services for the people of Wisconsin with a low-wage, low-benefit, high-turnover workforce model. Adding a reasonable wage floor will make our public programs stronger and help retain good workers in public agencies. An important group to benefit will be the vulnerable people in the care of state institutions.
3. ***Collective Bargaining Rights for All:*** Act 10 gutted collective bargaining for public-sector employees. Topics of bargaining have been restricted to wages alone, capped at the rate of inflation. Unions that choose to certify must hold a recertification vote every year to be able to bargain, which pressures unions to constantly run elections, leaving no time and energy for solving workplace problems. Last but not least, Act 10 cut benefits and take-home pay for state workers, making recruitment and retention of expertise all the more difficult for our state agencies. We want collective bargaining rights restored for *all* public and private employees in Wisconsin.
4. ***Quality Public Services for All.*** For the last 40 years governments have cut public funding and instead promoted private business as the solution to all social ills. As a result, income inequality is the highest it has been in decades, and the public sector has been hollowed out right as a pandemic shook all of society. The rich have their taxes cut again and again, while the poor see state aid vanish.

We want to build a public sector that is equipped to do its job of ensuring a high quality of life for everyone. That means state funding that ensures everyone has healthcare, everyone has quality schools, everyone can enjoy parks and lakes and forests, everyone has a home, and everyone has good food. It also means that the public employees who staff these programs are paid a good wage and shown respect in their workplace. It will be no small project to end the animus against public sector work and services, but we are committed to this project as residents of Wisconsin and as state workers.