

MEASURE: HB 2448
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February 21, 2013

Re: Imposition of furlough days

Dear Legislators:

As President of AFSCME Local 1442, Columbia County Employees, I would like to speak to the imposition of furlough days by the Columbia County Commissioners via the expedited bargaining process.

In 2009 and 2010 the County was in a fiscal bind and asked the Local to accept a wage/hour reduction by taking furlough days. After negotiating with the County, the local agreed to take 4 furlough days in 2009 and 8 furlough days in 2010. Although we were not happy about the situation, we appreciated the fact that the County Commissioners were willing to talk it out and come to a mutual agreement.

In 2011, the County took a very different approach. Without speaking or negotiating with the local, the Commissioners delivered a letter informing us of their intent to unilaterally impose 26 furlough days. Their representative brought me this letter that I later found out triggered expedited bargaining.

We, as a local, felt that the County was imposing this in an unfair and totally arbitrary manner. There is nothing in our collective bargaining agreement that speaks to furlough days. We demanded to bargain, went to the table, and the County did not move an inch until the last day of bargaining. On that day they offered to impose 25 rather than 26 furlough days. We rejected the offer, and they promptly implemented not only furlough days, but language to the contract that explicitly allowed them to implement furlough days at their discretion.

Again in 2012, the County continued the imposition of 26 furlough days, which was later reduced to 21 days as some monies became available.

AFSCME Local 1442 is committed to providing excellent service to the public. This is difficult to do with a reduced work week and the Courthouse being closed on Fridays. Although the members have been affected financially by the furlough days, the fact that they cannot provide the level of service they would like, is even more troubling.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to present this message.

Pam Benham
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