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To the Editor:

Illinois state workers aid their communities every day in myriad ways. They protect children from abuse and neglect, care for aging veterans and individuals with disabilities, keep prisons secure and supervise parolees, monitor air and water quality, respond to natural disasters, and much more.

They do it all despite staffing shortages that make their jobs more difficult and, often, more dangerous. During the pandemic, they answered the call under the most challenging conditions, many putting themselves and their families at risk in order to continue serving on the front lines.

Given all these employees do to provide essential public services, the wage increases included in their new union contract are fair and deserved, as well as being consistent with state and national averages.

The terms of this contract are also intended to address the severe staff shortages in state government—both by making wage rates fairer and by committing the union and the employer to work together to strengthen recruiting efforts and streamline the hiring process.

The *Journal's* concern about Illinois' "fiscal and economic health" in its July 31 editorial is very much misplaced. In fact, Illinois finances and bond rating are the best they have been in decades.

The *Journal's* call to put the squeeze on working-class people who have dedicated their careers to public service isn't fiscal responsibility, it's harsh and ill-conceived austerity that does nothing to address the urgent need to staff the front lines of public service.

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