



Frequently Asked Questions: Unifying with AFSCME Council 66

Dear AFSCME members,

We've enjoyed the opportunity to meet with many of you in person to discuss the proposal to unite Council 35 with Council 66. Many of you have important questions that we want to ensure get answered before we hold a final membership vote on this proposal. Some of the most common questions and answers are listed below. We plan to speak with as many members as possible before we hold a membership vote.

Question: What is Council 35?

Answer: *Council 35 is part of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), a nationwide union of 1.4 million members who work in public service. Council 35 is made up of about 1,400 AFSCME members from three local unions in the City of Buffalo. Council 35's executive board is made up of members of these three locals: Local 264, Local 650 and Local 2651. The Council has no professional staff and is run entirely by its executive board.*

Q: What is Council 66?

A: *Council 66 is also a part of AFSCME. It is a statewide union of about 8,500 members across upstate New York. Council 66 has its headquarters in Rochester, and has offices in Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany and the Hudson Valley. About 1,400 members of Council 66 work in Erie County. The union represents workers in cities like Rochester, Syracuse and Albany who work in similar job titles to members of Council 35.*

Council 66 members are part of an active and engaged union that fights for the benefits of all its members. The Council employs a full team of professional staff, including two union attorneys, six labor relations specialists (LRS), an experienced political and communications director, and professional support staff.

Q: How does unifying with Council 66 affect our membership dues?

A: *It doesn't. If your local is at minimum dues per the national union constitution, there is no dues increase for unification. This unification does not require a dues increase. Only your local has the right to increase your dues other than the mandatory minimum—and that requires a formal membership vote.*

Q: Why are we considering this proposal now to unify with Council 66?

A: *The way things have always been done in Buffalo is not sustainable, and Council 35's leadership recognized it's time to make a change for workers in this city. For the last few years, the leaders of Council 35 have tried to fix things and have determined they could not do it by themselves. Many of us have been working under expired contracts for more than a year and we believe that the way things have been going cannot continue. With a new mayor coming into office next year, now is the time for us to get active, engaged and organized to win improvements at the bargaining table. We believe that by unifying with Council 66, we will be able to create a stronger union and win better wages, benefits and working conditions for all city employees.*

Q: What is a labor relations specialist (LRS)?

A: *A labor relations specialist (LRS) is a professional employee who works on behalf of local unions and rank-and-file union members. They help local unions negotiate with employers, enforce contracts, argue arbitrations, train union stewards, assist union officers, and organize members to take action. They are highly trained in their field. If this unification is approved, Council 66 has committed to hiring a new LRS specifically assigned to the three locals in the City of Buffalo.*

Q: What do we gain by voting yes and unifying with Council 66?

A: *By voluntarily unifying with Council 66, we will grow stronger as a union and will be better placed to win fair wages, benefits and working conditions for all AFSCME members in the City of Buffalo. There is strength in numbers and as part of Council 66, we would be joining forces to create a strong statewide union of about 10,000 AFSCME members across upstate New York.*

Under the Council 66 constitution, Local 264 is entitled to two seats on the Council 66 Executive Board. Local 650 is entitled to one seat on the board. As part of the unification, Council 66 has committed to changing their constitution to ensure Local 2651 also gets one seat on the union's executive board. Local 264 and Local 650 would be the fourth and fifth largest locals in Council 66, and together, City of Buffalo employees will have an important say in setting the union's priorities. Members of Council 66 are actively engaged with union and community allies in Buffalo and elsewhere.

In addition to having an assigned full-time Labor Relations Specialist to serve members in Buffalo, we will also have the help of Council 66's other staff members. The council employs two experienced union attorneys, one of whom is based in Buffalo. Council 66 also has an active communications and political action program that keeps members informed and engaged. As part of a statewide union, we will harness Council 66's extensive political influence in Western New York, Albany and even in Washington, DC, through the national union.

Q: Are we losing anything by voting to unify with Council 66?

A: *No. The local unions in Buffalo will remain the same. The change will be that Council 66 will now provide staff and resources to the locals.*

Q: What will happen to my local union if we unify with Council 66?

A: *Your local union will keep all its current autonomy. Members will continue to have the final say on any tentative agreements with management. Members will also continue to elect local union officers, who will remain the same until there is another election or a vacancy occurs. Any and all funds that are in your local union's treasury will not be affected by unifying with Council 66.*

Q: What happens if we vote no and this unification does not go ahead?

A: *Things will likely stay the same or continue to get worse. Our union will continue to shrink and our ability to change things in Buffalo will continue to decline. We will remain stuck at the bargaining table as we try to negotiate new contracts. And we will not have access to the staff support, tools and resources that Council 66 can offer.*

Q: What are the next steps in the unification process?

A: *The Council 66 Executive Board has voted unanimously to approve a resolution to unify with the three locals under Council 35. AFSCME International staff will be speaking one-on-one with the 1,400 members of Council 35 in Buffalo. If the majority of members indicate a desire for this unification, we will hold a membership vote. If members vote to approve this proposal, Council 66 will call a constitutional convention to be held December 5.*

Do you support this proposal? Do you still have lingering questions? Please contact either your local union president; Ryan Welles, AFSCME New York Area Field Services Director, rvelles@afscme.org, 218-591-8350; or Malick Ndione, AFSCME Organizer, mndione@afscme.org, 410-900-7869.

This is the beginning of a new day for AFSCME members in the City of Buffalo. We look forward to continuing to meet with you and working together to build a stronger union.

In Solidarity,



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