

118 Central Ave, Nashwauk, MN 55769

City of Virginia
127 First St S
Virginia, MN 55792

January 23, 2024

Virginia City Council Members,

We, representatives of the undersigned organizations, are reaching out to express our collective support for the dedicated workers and AFSCME members with the City of Virginia. We recognize the invaluable contributions made by these workers. They maintain essential services and ensure the smooth operation of the city.

After years of high inflation and economic uncertainty, cutting benefits is a slap in the face to these dedicated public service workers. The employees of the City of Virginia are the backbone of the city. They contribute tirelessly to the health, wellbeing, and safety of the community, and they deserve a contract that recognizes the importance of their work.

Balancing budgets on the backs of these dedicated public service workers is short-sighted. Overtime pay exists to recognize workers who give up their time with family to make sure our community services are available, our communities are safe, and our roads are clear. Reducing this benefit fails to recognize the sacrifice these workers make when they put in extra hours.

The result of this and any other benefit cuts will be a loss of experienced workers, which will have a negative impact on services upon which residents rely. Therefore, we urge the Virginia City Council to continue to compensate workers fairly for working beyond their regular hours and negotiate in good faith to reach a fair contract settlement.

Sincerely,

Scott DaRonco
President, AFSCME Local 454
City of Virginia

John Arbogast
Representative, United Steelworkers
District 11

Bernie Burnham
President, Minnesota AFL-CIO

Dan Manick
Representative, IUOE Local 49

Jacob Friend
President, USW Local 2660
US Steel Keewatin Taconite

Joel Martinson
President, IAFF Local 390
Virginia Fire Department

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Shannon Douvier Lee Culter
Executive Director, AFSCME Council 65

Bobbi Otto
President, AFSCME Local 730
Essentia Health Virginia

Jay Asuma
AFSCME Local 729
Virginia Public Utilities

Crystal Kreklow
State Field Director, AFSCME Council 5

Clara Kardell
President, AFSCME Local 3
Rock Ridge Schools

Brett Johnson
President, AFSCME Local 3594
Arrowhead Transit

Jaymes Cuff
President, AFSCME Local 484
City of Eveleth

Terah Rinerson
President, AFSCME Local 627
City of Gilbert

Troy Oelke
President, AFSCME Local 1490
City of Ely

Jennifer Nyhus
President, AFSCME Local 791
City of Hibbing

Lueva B. Karachalios
President, AFSCME Local 1119-1
Fairview Range Hibbing

Jessica Loons
President, AFSCME Local 545
Cloquet Public Schools

Leonard Pahule
President, AFSCME Local 536-1
City of Chisholm

Rebecca Bosanko
President, AFSCME Local 2750
Carlton County HHS

Lee Cutler
Northeast Area Labor Council
AFL-CIO

I am Scott DaRonco, President of AFSCME Local 454.

Members of AFSCME Local 454 and area labor partners are here today to tell the Council that we will not accept the City's attempts to balance their budget on the backs of public service workers.

In the two bargaining sessions that the City has engaged in to date, the City has made a variety of proposals that would reduce benefits like insurance premium contributions, elimination of basic scheduling protections, and the elimination of long-standing seniority rights and protections, offering only a 1% increase in exchange for these take backs.

Most concerning of all is a proposal the City has made to reduce overtime pay and say that if one of our members uses sick leave, vacation days, or is paid for a city- or statutory designated holiday in a week, they would not receive overtime pay if the City asks them to work additional hours or mandates that they work additional hours.

When the City needs and offers additional work preparing for or staffing an event in our parks, working at our arena or events center, or even completing scheduled overtime work for our streets department, the City has proposed that they should be allowed to pay those workers less. That they should be allowed to pay workers the bare minimum required under the law.

We know that the way to attract and retain quality employees is not to do the bare minimum, and we are here today to state our objection to all of these proposals and to ensure that the entire Council and the Virginia community are aware of the consequences of these changes—to both staffing AND services.

We have brought here today a letter signed by many of our local labor partners and leaders within Virginia and the region. These signatures include:

- the President of the Minnesota AFL-CIO,
- presidents of locals representing Essentia Health Virginia, Virginia Public Utilities, Rock Ridge Schools, and the Cities of Eveleth and Gilbert, and
- representatives of the Operating Engineers Local 49, United Steelworkers District 11 and Local 2660, and many others.

Their signatures reflect their understanding of how detrimental these proposals would be to the City of Virginia and the region, and their support is echoed by our own membership, who has voted unanimously to continue to reject these harmful changes.

We are proud to work for the City. We are proud to support our contract. And we hope that the City will use our next mediation session on January 26 to bargain in good faith and work to find a resolution rather than continuing to pursue an agenda that will harm our members and the community we serve.