

# Concession deal likely to live or die with AFSCME

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The fate of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's tentative concessions deal with unionized state employees likely rests with AFSCME Council 4, the largest, most diverse and most divided of the 15 state employee unions, whose members will not cast their last votes until Thursday.

AFSCME is the only union in SEBAC, the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition, large enough to kill the tentative deal for concessions and other labor savings by itself. With some major AFSCME locals yet to vote, ratification by the labor giant is trailing votes to reject by about a 4-3 margin.

The source of AFSCME's veto power lies in the two-part requirement for ratification: 14 of the 15 unions in SEBAC must approve; and the unions in favor must have a membership equal to 80 percent of the unionized workforce of about 45,000.

With a membership of 15,600, AFSCME represents one-third the workforce, meaning that SEBAC cannot hit the 80-percent threshold without AFSCME. No other union represents more than 20 percent. As of today, with the approval by Connecticut Police and Fire Union, the tentative deal has been approved by five of the 15 unions in SEBAC, including the second largest union in the coalition, the 7,700-member New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199/SEIU.

No union has rejected it.

The 15 unions have 34 bargaining units: 11 unions have one unit, while four have multiple units. They are AFSCME, District 1199/SEIU, AFT Connecticut and CSEA/SEIU Local 2001.

AFSCME's second-largest bargaining unit, the NP-3 group representing 4,500 clerical workers, voted to ratify last week, 1,805 to 1,605, as did several small units in higher education.

But other elements of AFSCME, which has nine bargaining units, have voted no, setting up a critical vote Tuesday by the union's third-largest group, the P-2 bargaining unit representing about 4,000 human and social service workers.

Jay Bartolomei, the president of Local 714, one of three locals in the P-2 group, said he believes his co-workers recognize they may be the casting the make-or-break votes.

"As we see other vote totals come in, officially or unofficially, we always knew it would be a close vote," Bartolomei said today.

Bartolomei said his bargaining unit has held 50 informational meetings on the tentative agreement, reaching at least 90 percent of its members, whom he described as well-attuned to the tough economy. Most members are front-line workers at the departments of Labor, Social Services and Children and Families.

"We have an unprecedented increase in work. We see the need out there," he said.

For ratification, the P-2 unit must approve the tentative deal by a significant margin to offset no votes by others.

Two bargaining units, representing 1,600 judicial and criminal justice employees, voted together on the SEBAC deal, rejecting it, 763 to 513.

Two of three locals in the largest bargaining unit, the NP-3 group representing 4,800 Correction Department employees, have voted no, with the third, Local 391, to vote on Wednesday and Thursday. They will be the last AFSCME bargaining unit to vote on the deal.

Of the two locals that have voted in NP-3, only one, Local 387, has posted its results: a no vote of 417 to 91. The Day of New London reported that the vote by other, Local 1565, was 1,274 to 540. Based on votes posted by individual bargaining units and obtained by union sources, the incomplete tally in AFSCME is 2,818 opposed and 2,546 in favor. With the returns from 1565, the tally is 4,092 opposed and 3,086 in favor.

In addition, AFSCME Local 2836, representing about 700 administrators at the four state university campuses, have voted to ratify, but the exact vote was unknown.

The five unions to vote yes are:

- New England Health Care Employees Union, District 119/SEIU, representing 7,700 nurses, doctors, social workers, technicians and others in a various of agencies and facilities, including the UConn Health Center.
- AAUP at the University of Connecticut, representing 2,000 faculty and researchers at the main campus in Storrs and regional campuses in West Hartford, Waterbury, Torrington, Stamford and Avery Point.
- Connecticut Association of Prosecutors, representing 260 state prosecutors.
- Connecticut Federation of School Administrators, representing 61 principals and others at 18 vocational technical high schools.
- Connecticut Police and Fire union, representing about 900 public-safety personnel across state government, with the exception of state police officers.

Also today, Attorney General George Jepsen said his office would review a complaint by SEBAC that the conservative Yankee Institute was trying to convince members to reject the tentative agreement by subterfuge, including buy sending out emails posing as state employees.

His office also is referring matter to the state auditors under the whistleblower law.

"We will continue to review claims that state computer laws have been violated," Jepsen said. "At this time, there is insufficient information to comment further on the merits of these serious allegations." Fergus Cullen, the executive director of the institute, call the union complaint "paranoid and delusional" and without "a shred of proof."

"I think SEBAC's actions say they think it's going to be close," Cullen said.

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