



# TEAMSTERS LOCAL 727

*Affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*

---

1300 W. Higgins Road, Suite 111 • Park Ridge, Illinois 60068 • Phone: 847-696-7500 • Fax: 847-720-4984 • [www.TeamstersLocal727.org](http://www.TeamstersLocal727.org)

---

JOHN COLI, JR.  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

CURT ZIEDRICH  
*President*

## **Secretary-Treasurer John Coli, Jr.'s State of the Union Address**

Issued on: **December 15, 2019**

*Remarks as prepared for delivery*

Good afternoon and happy holidays everyone.

As you all know, every December I have the pleasure of delivering a state of the union address.

I consider it to be a great privilege to be able to stand before you, my Teamster Family, and acknowledge all that we've achieved together.

While writing this year's address and reflecting on our past year, I was once again reminded of the origin of our Union Power—our solidarity.

Local 727 stands out from other locals and unions. When we say we are going to do something, we put our words into action. And when we act, we act together with the full support of the Local behind us. We stand up together, we fight together, and we win together. One of 727's greatest strengths is the unity of our members. And because we all know that our strength only continues to grow as our local continues to grow, this year our union stepped up our organizing efforts.

Despite the new Trump-appointed Labor Board, 727 continues to pursue actions at the NLRB.

In 2019, 727 filed for 4 separate representation elections. In terms of Illinois Teamsters, those 4

elections account for 20% of the representation elections filed for by Joint Council 25 affiliates in Region 13 this year. And the results of our elections? I am proud to report that we were the most successful Local in our Joint Council, overwhelmingly winning every single election filed. That certainly isn't something this Local takes for granted.

This year we successfully increased our membership by organizing and welcoming close to 300 Brothers and Sisters into our Teamster Family, including more than 175 workers in the paratransit industry. These hardworking men and women have not only joined a strong Union with nearly 10,000 Brothers and Sisters but, thanks to our Union's focused organizing efforts in past years, these workers can count themselves among more than 1,200 Local 727 members employed in the paratransit industry. And we all know well, there is power in numbers.

Many of our new Teamster Brothers and Sisters work for Division 422. Division 422 drivers and aides are entrusted with providing vital paratransit services to special needs students at Chicago public schools. This past October, when the Division 422 drivers and aides ratified their very first collective bargaining agreement, they finally achieved fair bidding procedures, enhanced job protections, and wage increases. Such a strong, rich contract was possible because these brave workers had Local 727 backing them up, a strong union that has spent years fighting hard and successfully raising area standards. I am personally proud of our new members and this Union.

Despite the fact that these hardworking men and women voted specifically for 727 representation, despite the fact that they were prepared to initiate a ULP strike because they had

the strength of 727 behind them, and despite the fact that 727 representation helped them win a strong, fair first contract, Teamsters Local 777 has intervened in an effort to take these members away from the Union that they chose.

Apparently, 777 doesn't want to put in the hard work, time, or energy to organize these workers. Instead, they filed a jurisdictional dispute with Joint Council 25 to undercut our Union's hard work and appropriate members. The Joint Council heard this dispute back in July. While our Union was open and transparent about entering into negotiations for a first contract and continuing to do our duty to fairly represent Division 422 workers, JC25 was silent. They never said slow down or stay negotiations until a decision is made. We heard nothing until Tuesday of this past week—exactly 2 months after Division 422 members ratified their contract by 96%—when the Joint Council announced that Division 422 workers fall under 777's jurisdiction.

Regrettably, the Joint Council's decision fails to acknowledge the impact it will have on the aspirations of the Division 422 workers. It does not make any mention of the fact that these workers will be losing the protections and benefits of the strong contract we negotiated for them and that they ratified.

We are very disappointed in the failure of the Joint Council and Local 777 to honor the clear wishes of our Brothers and Sisters at Division 422. In the future, we hope that Local 777 will spend its energy organizing workers and building relationships with workers like we have done.

Over the past decade, Local 727 has leveraged the power of our large Union at the bargaining table to raise area standards for all Chicagoland paratransit workers. We have been able to radically transform the industry because MV, CDT, and First Transit employees have chosen to stand united as members of Local 727. The members of Division 422 should be given the opportunity to stand with their fellow paratransit workers and receive the benefits of a 727 contract. We will be appealing the Joint Council's decision and remain hopeful that the IBT will make the right decision and respect our Division 422 Brothers' and Sisters' choice to elect 727, not 777, as their collective bargaining representative. Local 727 will respect and honor the IBT's final decision.

Local 727 will not be deterred. We will continue to fight for fairness and respect for all workers.

In addition to working hard to raise industry standards in paratransit, improvements obtained by the Union in the Chicagoland soda industry have also resulted in a significant number of new soda members electing to join our union this year.

Recently, over 65 Keurig Dr Pepper salesmen voted overwhelmingly to join Local 727. This has not been easy for these employees as corporate bully Keurig Dr Pepper has fought this at every step. Despite Keurig Dr Pepper's unjust resistance and extensive, offensive efforts to prevent their hardworking employees from getting the union representation they democratically voted in favor of, the Union has not given up the fight. Local 727 has remained steadfast and strong in its efforts. 727 looks forward to bargaining this contract and continuing to be an unwavering partner on the strike line, someone to back you up when you're unjustly disciplined, and an

advocate for employees when companies place profits above safety. Neither Keurig Dr Pepper salesmen nor this Union will give up until these men and women get the representation they deserve.

I'm proud to say that our Union growth isn't slowing down anytime soon. Workers continue to seek out Local 727 representation because they have seen what we can deliver. Local 727 finds creative solutions to difficult problems facing blue-collar Americans. Take for instance our pension funds.

Like many in this country, some of our Brothers and Sisters have unfortunately experienced the uncertainty that comes with participation in failing pension funds. However, our members have had something the rest of the country hasn't—this Union and the strong 727 Pension Fund.

As of October 31, the Teamsters Local Union No. 727 Pension Fund has over \$440.5 million in assets and is 115.5% funded. And each year our Pension Fund continues to add active participants, strengthening the Fund even further.

Thanks to the stability of the 727 Pension Fund, our Union was able to propose a plan this year to merge the struggling Chicago Newspaper Publishers Drivers Union Pension Fund with the thriving 727 Pension Fund. Through this merger, Local 727 was able to save the pensions of nearly 850 participants, including our Chicago Tribune Brothers and Sisters.

This merger has been called one of the only of its kind and our Union has been applauded for successfully requiring an employer to inject over \$60 million to save a failing pension fund through contract negotiations. Apparently, the 727 Pension Fund Trustees are the only people who have figured out how to fix this pension crisis.

Our success in securing pensions through contract negotiations doesn't stop there. This year our Union was also able to rescue our trade show industry members from the failing Central States pension fund.

Central States has long said that its pension fund will be insolvent by 2025. As such, when our Union began negotiating a new trade show industry master agreement late last year, we seized the opportunity and made it a priority to bring new retirement security to hundreds of our members. To do so, the Union proposed two options for supplementing the failing Central States pension. Trade show members then democratically selected the option they believed was best for their bargaining unit.

While many unions and legislators talk about what can be done to fix our country's pension crisis, this Union rolled up its sleeves and got to work to employ real actionable solutions. 727 and the Pension Fund took a unique approach to remediating the looming pension crisis and, in doing so, brought members and their families more future stability upon retirement.

In addition to maintaining the health of the Pension Fund over the past 12 months, the trustees have also kept the 727 Health and Welfare and Legal and Educational Assistance Funds in excellent shape.

In 2019 alone, the Health and Welfare Fund paid nearly \$31 million in medical claims, over \$5.4 million in prescription claims, and more than \$2.9 million in dental claims. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the Trustees last year, in 2019 the Health and Welfare Fund was also able to expand and improve vision coverage for all plan participants. And recently, the Funds was able to restore the right of trade show industry members to buy up to 50 hours. We're proud that the 727 Funds were able to help more of our members qualify for our superb health care benefits and hope to begin restoring other benefits at the beginning of 2020.

This year, the educational assistance benefit sent out more than \$2.6 million in tuition and educational fee reimbursements to help make college more affordable for 727 members and their families—that's almost double the \$1.4 million given out by the IBT's James R. Hoffa memorial scholarship fund this year. After more than 20 years, the Legal and Educational Assistance Fund has distributed more than \$30 million in tuition reimbursements to participants and their eligible dependents.

The 727 pension, health and welfare, and legal and educational assistance funds are strong and thriving, but workers don't just want to join our Union because of the stability and long-term security the funds offer. They also see the immediate benefits of the Union—the rich contracts with strong job protections that are vigorously enforced by our Union.

In 2019, 727 negotiated over 70 new contracts. That includes a whopping 27 T.V. and film projects and 5 first contracts for new members. Just this past week, we successfully negotiated the first CBA covering new MV-VA members. Thanks to the hard work of our Union bargaining committee, this contract not includes significant wage raises and improved vacation leave, but also substantial job protections and a strong grievance procedure.

This year our 727 was also able to secure a successor agreement with Great Lakes Coca-Cola Distribution. I consider that contract to be one of our Union's top achievements this year because it illustrates the power of our unity. Because our GLCCD members stood together, our Union bargaining committee was not only able to secure a CBA that merged 3 contracts—the GLCCD, former Coca-Cola Refreshments inside, and former CCR outside contracts—but one that transitions merchandisers to hourly employees, eliminates half-time, limits live-loading, fixes mix-mode, and introduces a new more affordable PPO health care plan.

Such drastic changes would not have been achievable if it wasn't for our members' and our bargaining committee's resolute solidarity.

The power of our solidarity allows our Union to take on the critical issues facing our members and come out the other side of negotiations with a contract that guarantees results. The contracts our Union has negotiated this year have been so strong that 92% of them ratified with over 82% support. But the key to Local 727's ongoing success is that once a strong contract is secured and



ratified, we fight every single day to ensure every Company is abiding by the agreed terms of their signed CBA and we hold them accountable when they don't.

Local 727 does not hesitate to employ the strong grievance procedures that we have fought hard to secure anytime an employer fails to follow their CBA. So far this year, we have resolved 427 grievances, filed for 35 arbitrations, and are continuing to fight against misbehaving employers in hundreds of ongoing grievances. Of those resolved, unsurprisingly, 47% were filed against soda companies, including 42 against Keurig Dr Pepper, 74 grievances against GLCCD, and a whopping 101 against Pepsi—three of our biggest offenders this year.

Local 727 isn't afraid to take on any employer, no matter how large they may be, to ensure our members receive what's fair and just. If that means going to arbitration, then we'll go to arbitration and we'll fight tooth and nail for our Brothers and Sisters. Local 727 is not a union that gives up like so many others out there, just look at our *Beats* win this year.

In the summer of 2018, our Union filed a grievance against the motion picture company Beats Financing and Distribution after the company increased the budget for Netflix's upcoming drama *Beats* but failed to raise the hourly wages of our members and pay them a fair rate for their long hours and dedication to the big-budget project. As a result of our Union's advocacy and willingness to pursue the matter to arbitration, we were able to secure a settlement agreement from Beats' successor in interest, Orville Productions, that included \$40,000 in backpay for nearly 30 of our movie members.

While companies claim that they want to improve their relationships with their employees, their frequent disregard of their CBAs and federal labor law often tell another story. We will not forget their anti-union actions, especially when it comes time to negotiate new contracts. Pepsi members, I'm looking at you.

Next year when negotiations open, we cannot forget Pepsi's contractual violations. We must stay strong and demand change together. I can tell you right now, if Pepsi wants to reach an agreement, I expect them to bargain in good faith, give our members fair wages, and improve their benefits.

When an employer crosses the line, we have demonstrated that we will not hesitate to file unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB. Despite the Labor Board's deterioration under Trump appointees—many of whom so poorly administer their staff that the NLRB can no longer seem to manage even a simple, clear-cut case without tripping over their own feet—and despite the NLRB's new focus on attacking and weakening the hard-won rights of unions in our country, 727 has consistently proven that we can and will win at the Labor Board. That's something very few unions have been able to say recently.

In just the past six months, Region 13 of the NLRB has rejected all of Keurig Dr Pepper's attempts to overturn the election and has instead filed a complaint seeking to order the Company to recognize and bargain with us over a first contract for Northlake salesmen. CC Traffic has also been ordered to recognize and bargain with our Union, provide us with information we requested, and make whole our members, with interest, for any expenses that resulted from the

Company's failure to make fund contributions. Additionally, Region 13 has found merit with ULP charges filed by 727 against Chicago Jewish Funerals for the Company's failure to honor the agreement reached this year during contract negotiations.

On Friday, at long last, we also received word from the NLRB's Office of Appeals in D.C. I'm pleased to announce that the Office of Appeals has overturned Region 13's decision to dismiss the ULP charges we filed against CVS. The Office of Appeals determined that CVS has—as we have claimed for more than 3 years—been acting in bad faith throughout negotiations and has engaged in overall bad faith bargaining. As a result of this decision, CVS will be forced to reform its behavior or face complaint and a hearing.

This is a huge victory for our Union. According to the latest data published by the NLRB that the Union was able to locate, less than 2% of regional appeals are sustained. I am extremely proud of our CVS pharmacists for remaining united and steadfast throughout this trying process.

I'd also like to take a moment now to acknowledge our business agents and staff for their hard work, not just on CVS negotiations but on every contract, grievance, and issue that passes through our office. Thank you to each of you. This Union would not be so successful if it wasn't for your perseverance and dedication to our membership.

And 727 members know that if grievances, arbitrations, ULPs, or negotiations aren't enough to teach companies their lesson and protect our members, our Union agents and staff aren't afraid to fight on a larger stage to have legislation enacted to protect 727 industries and trades.

One of our biggest legislative victories this year was the passage of the Illinois Gaming Act. After more than a decade of pressing for the expansion of casino gambling to Illinois racetracks, our state legislature at long last approved the addition of slot machines and table games to Chicago-area tracks. This victory would not have been possible if it wasn't for the support of fellow union members and community leaders, including the Illinois AFL-CIO.

Last year, I proposed a resolution at the Illinois AFL-CIO's convention that called upon legislators to enact a new law that would save and create jobs by adding gaming facilities to Illinois racetracks. By passing my resolution and making gaming expansion a focus of the AFL-CIO's political agenda, my fellow Illinois AFL-CIO Executive Board members helped us to put pressure on state leaders, pressure that moved them to take action and helped to push the Gaming Act across the finish line. I am optimistic that the introduction of these games will help to revitalize the racing industry and bring greater job-security to many of our hardworking Brothers.

For the past two years, our Union has also worked diligently to encourage pharmacy reform in our state, showing up and speaking out at nearly every pharmaceutical task force meeting that was held. We were there, front row, to ensure the Task Force members knew the truth of what happens every day in retail pharmacies across Chicago. And because we were there, nearly all of the issues Local 727 brought to the public's attention—the issues that spurred the creation of the task force—were addressed. But even still, our work is not done.

Last month, state representatives attempted to shove through amendments to the Illinois Pharmacy Practice Act that did not go far enough to resolve critical issues facing retail pharmacists. Our Union fought back against these inadequate amendments. We called upon state officials to do what the Task Force initially failed to do: limit retail pharmacists' workdays to 8 hours, ensure all retail pharmacists have adequate in-pharmacy support by mandating a technician be on-duty at all times; and ensure retail employers are held accountable for their violations by specifying punitive penalties in the law. As a result of 727's relentless advocacy, Illinois legislators decided to extend the Task Force and have given Labor another seat at the table and another vote on the committee's decisions. Our fight will continue.

We will continue to speak up, continue to push back, continue to work until pharmacies in Illinois are safe for pharmacists. To make some of these tough laws a reality, we need to have politicians in office that will listen to our members. That is why this year we endorsed Lori Lightfoot in her bid for mayor.

With Mayor Lightfoot at the helm, we haven't seen the soda tax resurrected like Toni Preckwinkle promised. Instead, with Mayor Lightfoot in charge we have had a mayor that is willing to seek out alternative methods for generating revenue, methods that do not put the burden on working families. Rather than relying on the job-killing Chicago parking tax, we have seen the Mayor's office take charge and propose a new rideshare tax and other creative solutions to our city's problems. We will be looking for more lawmakers to step up as the mayor has in the new year.

Local 727 has a winning record because we fight hard to secure strong job protections in our members' contracts, because we have refused to back down when our Brothers and Sisters have had their rights violated, and because Local 727 members have stood together, united, and, time and time again, spoken with one voice.

In fact, the solidarity of our membership, especially our success on the Keurig Dr Pepper and Coca-Cola strike lines over the past few years, is still talked about by many today—not just in the soda industry but across all Chicagoland. When our Union speaks, employers know we mean what we say because we have proven that we'll fight together to protect every single one of our members.

This year we brought that reputation and strength to the strike lines of fellow workers to help bolster their fights. Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians, UIC graduate students, Chicago teachers, University of Chicago nurses, our fellow Teamsters with Local 25 in Boston, and our Brothers and Sisters downstate with Teamsters Local 50. We donated, wrote letters of solidarity, attended rallies, marched on picket lines, and even paid lost-time wages to members who refused to cross the strike lines of fellow union workers. Local 727 is proud to support workers that are willing to bravely stand up to fight for respect and fair treatment because, as we all know, union solidarity is union power. We hope to see other unions and locals follow 727's lead and take a stand with our members during job actions in the future.

In 2020, we must continue to build upon our past successes and grow our power and financial resources. Over the past year, the Executive Board and I have increased the Union's net assets

by more than 10%. Next year, we hope to go farther and to reach a new high so that we have the financial strength to take on any fight.

But we can't grow our union power alone. We need our entire Teamster Family to stand up and take action.

Continue to encourage your friends, your family, your non-union colleagues to organize.

Continue to stand up and to fight for one another. Continue to support every union member and every Teamster Brother and Sister. I'm counting on each one of you to help our Union make next year our best year yet.

Thank you.