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To the family of Jean Fightmaster:

I wish I could be with you today in person to share my sorrow at the passing of my old friend and OCSEA sister, Jean Fightmaster – a dogged trade unionist whose decades of leadership made a huge difference in the lives of AFSCME members in Ohio and around the country.

Jean enjoyed a long career proudly serving the people of Ohio – at the Franklin County Welfare Department and then for the state at the Bureau of Workers' Compensation. And she was everything you would hope and expect a union activist to be.

When Jean joined OCSEA, and when I was an OCSEA member, it was still an independent union. But Jean was instrumental in making sure that OCSEA became a part of the AFSCME family instead of affiliating with another union. She was also a leader in the landmark struggle to win collective bargaining rights for Ohio public service workers. I served with her on that first state bargaining team in 1986, and we were also at the table together negotiating a key contract in Franklin County. So, I saw up close just how tenacious she was, unintimidated by management and unwilling to take no for an answer.

She was an outspoken champion for women's rights, helping create the OCSEA Women's Action Committee and making it a priority to train AFSCME sisters to be bold activists. And even after she retired from public service in 2006, it surprised no one that Jean never let up and continued to make some noise. She was on the front lines in 2011 when Ohio voters defeated SB 5, an attempt to crush the rights and freedoms we had fought so hard for in the 1980s. Jean refused to go back to the dark days before we had collective bargaining in Ohio, when we had no voice on the job, when – as she often pointed out – women and people of color in particular didn't have the power they needed to protect themselves.

Jean was a force of nature – more than living up to her last name. She had a quick wit and a sharp tongue. With her passing, we've lost a stalwart whose love of her union was infectious. It's now up to us to carry her legacy forward. It's up to us to work as hard as she did for our union and for our communities.

Rest in power, sister.

In solidarity,

  
LEE SAUNDERS  
President

**American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO**

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