

Testimony on House Bill No. 2626
House Labor Relations Committee
September 18, 2008

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Teachers

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Labor Relations Committee:

Bernadette Lito taught high school English in the Catholic Schools of Pittsburgh for 42 years. When she retired in 1972 she retired with a pension check of less than \$100.00 a month and a three-day all-expense paid trip to Williamsburg, Virginia. That was the year the union, Local 2400, was voted on and accepted by the teachers in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The "Lito factor" was one of the early rallying cries for that organization.

Today, some 36 years later, Local 2400 is well established and successful in its operation as the representative of the teachers in the Pittsburgh Diocese. Our existence today is one of harmony and trust. In our negotiations and our daily interactions, we have found the Diocese to be generous, fair, and respectful of our position in matters of conflict and operation.

Catholic schools are tremendous academic institutions. The success of Catholic school students in the classroom and in the working world is well documented. Yet Catholic schools spend less money on education, teach, in many cases, in antiquated settings, and pay teachers less than their counterparts in the public sector. What does this mean? It means that Catholic teachers do a better job with less and for less. It means that Catholic school teachers sacrifice and spend more time in and out of the classroom while keeping the standards, requirements, and professionalism that stand them as tall as any school system in the state of Pennsylvania. On top of this, they uphold the moral fiber and social teachings of the Church as primary in their presence and presentation.

Catholic school teachers are the backbone of the Catholic school system. As such, they deserve to have the right to organize as any other teacher in the state does. They deserve the right to make a decent wage, have adequate health care for themselves and their families, be afforded a pension to care for them in their senior years, and to work in an environment that is just and fair. A diocese may provide for some or all of these for their teachers, but a union would guarantee them.

A union can guarantee a more stable environment, and a union can guarantee a fair continuity of service. Without these guarantees, teacher turnover is more frequent and teaching jobs become temporary....temporary until something more profitable and stable comes along for the teacher. The union benefits the teacher, the school, and the diocesan system in this matter. What sparks energy and motivates the worker is the spirit of community, a feeling of common security that they, as teachers, can feel a part of. The union serves the teachers in this case. A union protects and unites faculties. It assures them a feeling of comfort confidence and unity in the workplace. Everyone benefits from this feeling - students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

House Bill 2626 would give Catholic school teachers the opportunity to teach in such a fair and just environment, an environment that can bring all of the points previously mentioned into their working lives. But, the most important thing that House Bill 2626 brings is the right to organize. As earlier mentioned, Local 2400 in Pittsburgh and the Diocese of Pittsburgh have a model relationship. The union is recognized and the teachers work in a comfortable environment. This could all collapse in an instant without House Bill 2626, For whatever reason, Pittsburgh could

get a new Bishop tomorrow who personally would not recognize Local 2400, as was the case in Scranton, Pennsylvania. One man's personal philosophy could change all that was and all that is.

Respectful of the bishops, we can not afford to have one man determine the fate of hundreds of teachers, parents, and students. Years of service, years of stability, years of sacrifice by teachers can be lost with one stroke of a bishop's pen. House Bill 2626 would prevent this from happening,

Understanding that hard times happen, that consolidation of schools is necessary, and that jobs are lost, we cannot accept not having the right to organize and protect our families, our Catholic schools, and our careers. We cannot afford to have another "Lito factor." Please support House Bill 2626.

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