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Testimony on House Bill No. 2626
House Labor Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Labor Relations Committee:

One month ago, I had the opportunity to appear before the Committee to offer testimony in support of HB 2626, a measure desperately needed by my colleagues and me in order to fully enjoy our rights as workers and as citizens.

I am not here to again offer the same information as I did in August. I am here because as the last hearing progressed, members of the Committee asked several excellent questions both of me and others on the nature and workings of HB 2626. At that time, many of those questions went unanswered due to the fact that it required a good deal of research to find the answers. Atty. Milz and I are here today to supply answers to a few of those questions asked.

At that first hearing, you heard from several opponents of the Bill who said that if such legislation were passed, it would continually call on the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board to take sides in disputes between teachers and their employers where the issues to be decided were of a religious nature. Where, as one of the witnesses said, the issue in contention might be whether a Biblical passage means X or Y, and the state would have to judge whose view is to prevail. Another opponent said the Bill would be an outright invitation for the state to second guess religious authorities on religious issues and to substitute the labor board's judgment for that of Church authorities. Indeed, the opponents of the Bill went on and on with the argument that if HB 2626 became law the Board would be doing nothing more than ceaselessly presiding over disputes of this sort.

First, I need to say that we believe our opponents arguments of this sort are disingenuous and are being used to simply attempt to disguise what is a definite union animus on their part.

That aside, at the August hearing, Rep. Gergely asked one of the opponents of the Bill if he had specific evidence of the workings of a New York state law that has covered the employees of religiously-affiliated schools there since 1968. HB 2626 is patterned after that law which was held to be constitutional in that state's courts. When that person said he had no specific evidence, Rep Gergely said that a follow up on that issue was needed.

We did that follow up. We contacted the New York State Labor Relations Board which provided us with the following information. Over the years during which the employees of religiously-affiliated schools have been covered under the New York Labor Relations Act it appears that there has never been a filing with the Labor Relations Board by the employer or the employees that drew the Board into a situation where it was called upon to resolve a religious dispute. From every indication, the filings seen by the Board were the same kind of meat and potatoes issues that affect all employer/employee relationships.

It is our contention, that if HB 2626 is enacted, the General Assembly could expect the workings of the law to be no different in Pennsylvania than they have been in New York.