

Jewish Labor Committee
1816 Chestnut St. Philadelphia, PA 19103
phone: (215)587-6822 fax: (215)587-6823 e-mail: jlcras@aol.com

**Testimony of the Jewish Labor Committee in Support of HB 2626,
An Act amending the act of June 1, 1937 (P.L.1168, No.294), known as the Pennsylvania
Labor Relations Act, further providing for definitions; and providing for disputes
involving religious employers.**

**Presented by Rosalind Spigel, Director of the Philadelphia Jewish Committee
To the House Labor Committee.**

September 18, 2008

The Jewish Labor Committee is taking this opportunity to go on record to support HB 2626, a bill giving lay teachers and employees of private religious schools the right to join collective bargaining units.

HB 2626 has been debated ad nauseam.

Mr. Pashinski, prime sponsor of the bill, has said he hopes to strike a balance between employee rights and the protection of religious doctrines through the legislation. Respectfully, I say to Mr. Pashinski there is no need to strike a balance between employee rights and the protection of religious doctrine because that balance has already existed for centuries. In fact, religious doctrine spells out employee rights.

Countless hours of rabbinic debate and effort have yielded an expansive body of literature designed to infuse Godliness and meaning into the way you and I conduct ourselves at work. Perhaps the central area of concern in Jewish religious law is in the treatment of workers.

In terms of workers and workers' rights, the ancient sacred text of the Talmud recognizes the general principle that "the Rabbis hold that the workers [always] deserve the advantage" in their relationship to the employer. It is clear that worker organizations existed during the period in which the Talmud was codified. **Moreover, the Talmud explicitly recognizes the right of worker organizations to regulate wages and to make binding rules and regulations on members of the association, in much the same way that trade unions negotiate wages and conditions for their members.**

The Catholic Church recognizes the positive role for labor unions and its basic principles of social teaching also includes the right of individuals to participate in decisions that affect them and the dignity of all workers. **These Catholic social teachings form a moral basis for the right of workers to organize.**

I know there are people of all faiths who support this bill. The change to the PA Labor Relations Act would apply equally to all religiously-affiliated organizations employing lay people -- be it Catholic schools, Jewish day schools, Quaker organizations, and so on -- and would give their lay employees the opportunity to exercise the same rights enjoyed by all other employees in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to organize and join a labor organization. HB 2626 is not about religion. It does not regulate religion and it does not purport to regulate belief. For those who argue other-wise, HB 2626 constitutes an expansion of individual rights and will not inappropriately infringe upon the religious freedoms of any particular group. The same group of people cannot simultaneously experience both an expansion of freedoms and infringement of freedoms.

The free choice to join with others and bargain for better wages and benefits is essential to economic opportunity and good living. Our tradition teaches us the relationship between human beings in matters of business should be treated as sacred and holy. Therefore support for HB 2626 furthers the interests of both secular and religious groups that believe in the dignity of the worker.

Thank you for your time. The Jewish Labor Committee urges you to support HB 2626.