

Paycheck Protection Legislation (HB 1507)

Testimony of Keith Williams

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PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

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Good morning and thank you for your time and interest in protecting the constitutional rights of Pennsylvania's dedicated educators. Specifically, I would like to thank Chairman Metcalfe, Chairman Cohen and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Keith Williams, and I have worked in public education for the past 17 years. I am HS English teacher and resident of the Conewago Valley School District. My wife and I have three step-children and a foster son in my district, and I have been employed by CVSD for the past 14 years. With the exception of my first year in the district, I have never been a member of the teachers union. Throughout my time at Conewago Valley, I have also served as a cross country coach, Jr. High track and field coach, and member of our school's Student Assistance Program for at-risk youth. For over a decade, I led an innovational outdoor education program that involved teaching students outdoor skills using American literature as the context for field studies to such places as the Grand Canyon, Zion, Crater Lake, Yellowstone, and Acadia National Parks. I also proudly served with my search and rescue team in the recovery efforts immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 2001, where I spent weeks combing through the debris to find personal effects and victims' remains. I firmly believe that doing what is right is not always comfortable. I believe that standing up for what is right, regardless of criticism or threats, is the only way I can ever hope to make a difference, and that is why I stand before you today in full support of paycheck protection.

This legislation is important to all education employees and is necessary to protect union members and fee payers. HB 1507 promotes transparency and will ensure that teachers are not paying for political activity they do not support. While the PSEA claims to support my local interests, it donates tens of thousands to political candidates and causes well beyond the borders of my district and county, and in many cases, outside the Commonwealth. As fee-payers and taxpayers, teachers have a right to know where and how their money is politically allocated.

Conewago Valley was an "open shop" district for the 14 years I have been employed by the district and until several months ago. As I mentioned earlier, I was a member only during my first year with the district, when I was sold the line that "you need the liability protection." In March of 2013, the union membership in Conewago Valley voted to become closed-shop and collected over \$20,000 from the earnings of myself and 45 of my non-union colleagues using taxpayer resources. If money is being siphoned from the earnings of teachers under the guise of "benefitting from the union's existence", *both* fee payers and members have a right to determine how the state and national unions allocate our earnings.

Again, as both a taxpayer and educator, I'm particularly concerned about this use of taxpayer resources serving as a collection tool for political purposes. HB 1507 removes the burden from the district for unfairly utilizing taxpayer-funded payroll services for the purposes of partisan political activity. What other political lobbyists have the ability to collect millions of dollars using the same staff and resources my property taxes currently support? I can think of no other group, and the only individuals I can recall who have co-mingled taxpayer resources with their political campaigning have received prison time.

As both a teacher and homeowner in my school district, I and my colleagues call on you to end this abuse of taxpayer resources for the purpose of collecting on behalf of political lobbyists. HB 1507 does not weaken unions. Instead, it asks only that they function within the same parameters as any other political group.

I would like to again thank Chairman Metcalfe, Chairman Cohen and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions.