

Chairman Cox, Chairman Mullery, and distinguished members of the Labor and Industry Committee, my name is Jason Kohute and I am a state employee. I started working for the state in a temporary capacity in 2016, then moved to PennDOT in 2017. I now work for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency.

When I first started working for the state, I was handed a stack of paperwork to fill out, including a card to join the union. It felt like I had no choice but to sign up. I did have some reservations at that point about joining a union, but I'd also heard positive things about union membership, so I filled out the card. By 2018, when the Supreme Court said you didn't have to pay union dues anymore, I no longer wanted to be in the union. I constantly wondered why the union would spend so much money on politics instead of on doing a better job representing employees.

For example, in 2018 my office building in Harrisburg had a bedbug problem. I was on a union call where someone tried to raise this issue, and the union representative was dismissive of her concerns and instead spent time trying to tell us how to vote. Half of the meeting was spent on telling us who to vote for – all Democrats – and who to vote against – all Republicans.

After I left the union, I had to approach a union representative to file a grievance. I could not represent myself with my employer and I was not permitted to find outside representation, I had to go to the union to deal with the issue. In the process of filing the grievance, the union rep signed me back up for the union without even asking me if that's what I wanted. When I approached the union to tell them I wanted to resign my membership again, they told me that I would have to wait a full year before I could leave.

Lawmakers could change this and give public employees the ability to hold their unions accountable if they do not provide good representation. Public employees should have the opportunity to say "yes" to union membership instead of having to ask permission to leave.

I also think we shouldn't have to wait until a window of time opens to leave the union. If you are a Netflix subscriber and you want to stop your subscription, you don't have to wait for some magical window to open to stop paying them. It should be the same for people who want to leave the union.

I hope these bills encourage the unions to represent their members better. I wish they would focus on making their employees' working conditions better instead of focusing on politics.

Thank you,
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