

November 15, 2021

Re: House Labor and Industry Committee Hearing on Public Sector Union "Reform" Legislation

Dear Chairman Cox, Chairman Mullery, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club, Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania, and the Natural Resources Defense Council write to express our strong opposition to the bills that are the subject of today's hearing: HB 844, HB 845, HB 2036, HB 2037, HB 2042, and HB 2048. Each would make collective bargaining harder for public sector employees; collectively, they represent an attempt to cripple public sector unions under the guise of "reform."

Two of our organizations are member-based and count Pennsylvanians who belong to public sector unions as members. Our opposition to the "reform" bills being discussed today owes in part due to concern for them, and in part to the fact that public sector unions represent many employees of the Department of Environmental Protection, Public Utility Commission, and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. By bargaining for whistleblower protections, workplace safety standards, and other worker protections, unions help ensure that those agencies have skilled and well-trained workers to safeguard the health and well-being of Pennsylvania communities

In addition, we oppose the bills being discussed today because as a general matter, we believe unions have a critical role to play in building an equitable clean energy economy in the Commonwealth. Today, many Pennsylvanians lead a precarious existence, in part due to public policies that have undermined the ability of unions to organize workers and advocate for their interests over the last four decades. We support a future where our economy is based on clean energy and unions have a greater role in the economy than they have today. The negotiating power of unions helps ensure the safety and the health of our communities and spurs economic development across the Commonwealth by brokering fair wages, benefits, and conditions for their members. This not only helps members and their families; high union density in a sector improves wages, benefits, and conditions across the board. The impact of unions on total nonunion wages is almost as large as the impact on total union wages.

In short, when workers join unions, the entire Commonwealth benefits from fair wages, better working conditions, and safer communities. Consequently, public sector workers should not be penalized nor face increased barriers when joining unions, and we respectfully request that you oppose the bills being discussed today.

Thank you,

Jennifer Quinn, Legislative and Political Director
Sierra Club, Pennsylvania

Katie Blume, Political Director
Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania

Mark Szybist, Senior Attorney, Climate and Clean Energy
Natural Resources Defense Council