

CLEAR COALITION

COALITION FOR LABOR ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABLE REVENUES

November 15, 2021



The Honorable Jim Cox
213 Ryan Office Bldg.
PO Box 202129
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2129

RE: House Labor and Industry Public Hearing on Public Sector Union Reform Legislation



We are writing to you on behalf of the more than 900,000 working Pennsylvanians and their families who we represent. CLEAR members are teachers and college professors, firefighters, nurses and healthcare professionals, direct care workers, cafeteria workers, court and county government workers, school psychologists, secretaries, and paraprofessionals. CLEAR members serve all Pennsylvanians, including seniors and children – the most vulnerable among us – and people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities.



While CLEAR is always eager to engage in important policy discussions, we are disheartened by the topic of today's hearing. Ordinary Pennsylvanians who have struggled with job losses, financial insecurity, gaps in caregiving support, and uncertainty in meeting basic needs are looking for leadership to bring recovery, stability, and prosperity in the wake of the pandemic. For too long, workers and employers alike have been asking lawmakers to help support the Commonwealth's economic recovery. Our members—who are your constituents—have been asking you and your fellow lawmakers to take action to support Pennsylvania workers and Pennsylvanians who want to return to the workforce. And employers—who are also your constituents—have been asking policy makers to help advance solutions to the challenges facing various industries and sectors that are struggling to adequately fill critical positions and meet the needs of our 21st century workforce.



We know with the utmost certainty that ordinary Pennsylvanians are not calling upon lawmakers to advance the “reforms” that are the topic of today's hearing. Further, we know that Pennsylvanians have never considered these bills a priority, as evidenced not only by several failed attempts to enact these proposals, but also by the lack of participation in today's hearing.



The agenda of today's public hearing is nothing more than an ideologically driven attack, funded by out-of-state billionaires and extremist organizations that seek to diminish unions and their role in the workplace. Make no mistake, the “union reform” bills are not about protecting workers' rights and freedoms. Rather than use a standing committee of the General Assembly to address the very real concerns of Pennsylvanians, anti-worker politicians have chosen to use their power and public platform to push an agenda that would make it harder for public service workers to join together to have a voice in the workplace, a voice that ensures workers' rights and freedoms, and leads to higher quality public services for all Pennsylvanians. Again, this is disheartening and out-of-touch.



What is more, proponents of “union reform” wrongly assume that public employers and taxpayers do not benefit from collaborative partnerships with unions. Exclusive representation helps foster stability and productive working relationships among employers and their workforces. Collaboration provides a beneficial framework for effective operations, including affording consistent treatment of employees; less distraction over perceived arbitrary treatment, financial and otherwise, of individual employees; a structure for providing communication and feedback between management and front-

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line employees; and a method to ensure support and management of employees in a systematic, fair, and dignified manner. Proponents of these “reform” bills may be surprised to learn that public employees value their unions. At the core of our collective membership is a resounding desire to be supported and respected for the challenging and important work our members perform in service to the Commonwealth.

As Chairman of the House Labor Committee, we urge you, instead of wasting time on efforts to dismantle the unions that support and protect nurses, teachers, firefighters, police officers, and other public service workers, please use your position and power to help advance solutions for the issues that truly matter to Pennsylvanians. Clearly, if employers, business associations, workers, and labor unions are united in identifying barriers to Pennsylvania’s economic recovery, it is time for the Legislature to act.

Investments in Pennsylvania’s workforce are essential to keep our businesses running, our economy strong, and most importantly – ensuring Pennsylvania’s families are not struggling. We urge lawmakers to invest the untouched American Rescue Plan federal dollars to help Pennsylvanians get back to work; help businesses to thrive and keep Pennsylvania our public schools safe and open for instruction. To this end, the CLEAR coalition, and its individual member unions, stand ready to work with you and members of the House Labor Committee to:

- Address the growing shortage of teachers, substitute teachers, bus drivers, school nurses, paraprofessionals, and other education support personnel
- Ensure our health care facilities and nursing homes are safely and adequately staffed
- Invest in our workforce to keep our supply chain strong, especially those workers who are essential to our nation’s food supply
- Invest in the childcare sector so that everyone who wants to return to work, can
- Provide hazard pay for essential workers to attract and retain workers in these vital industries
- Invest in physical improvements, maintenance, and repair of our school buildings, many of which are unsafe for teaching and learning
- Fix the broadband gap that exists between rural, suburban and city communities. This is a critical investment that will generate economic development, business expansion, and ensure that our children can access a 21st century education, no matter where they live.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We look forward to working with you to address issues that truly matter to Pennsylvanians.

Signed,



Rick Bloomingdale, President,
Pennsylvania AFL-CIO



Stephen Catanese, President, SEIU Local 668



Rich Askey, President, PSEA



David Henderson, Executive Director, AFSCME



Dr. Jamie Martin, President, APSCUF



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