

Good Afternoon,

My name is Meaghan Diffenderfer, I'm a resident of Winooski, and currently employed at City Market / Onion River Co-op. I have been an employee of the co-op for a little over 4 years, and have been a card signing member of our union - United Electrical Local 203 - since the day I was eligible, coming up on 4 years. In my time as a union member I have served as a Steward, Vice President, and on the Bargaining Committee. Over the last several years, my calling shifted to include work on the City Market Board of Directors. I found this leading after much personal deliberation on how leadership is often at its best when those impacted by decisions have a seat at the table. The co-op's board functions using a policy governance model, and my conflict of interest as a union employee who also sits on the board has been a fairly easy transition for all parties, having now entered my second year on the board. I'm hoping to take a few moments to share how the co-op has implemented having employees serve on the Board, of which I am not the first. This can seem a daunting task but ultimately leads to inclusive and representative leadership.

My conflict of interest has been addressed by practices that are straightforward and do not impede on my ability to still participate in full as a board member. I do not sit in on board discussions regarding labor relations, including the General Manager's pay and any personnel issues, or participate in the Board vote on our labor contract. I am, however, still able to vote on the contract as a member of the union. There are several leadership roles within the Board that I can not hold (President, Vice President, and Treasurer) as they would require me to be present at all conversations, and I also can not hold leadership positions within the union including being a steward, since those are roles that can make legally binding decisions for the co-op. Protections like these ensure that I would not be the only bargaining unit employee carrying knowledge that is otherwise confidential, protects the co-op from having one person having the potential to make legally binding decisions for more than one party, and also ensures that I do not have more voting power than any other board member or co-op employee. These few simple, clear boundaries allow me and any other employee who may sit on the board, as we can have up to two employees on the board at once, to be full participants.

To me, an employee's voice in any leadership entity should be one that is welcomed, encouraged, and fought for. We are at our best when all voices are heard, all sides understood, and all parties work together to act in good faith. To allow impacted voices a seat at the table allows buy-in from employees, knowing that their voices have been heard during decision making processes, and ultimately creates better functioning boards, businesses, and schools. I sincerely hope this bill is supported in full, and that our state can continue to lead the way in what representative leadership can and should look like.