



**Testimony of Alan Raff,
New Hampshire AFL-CIO and State Director of the New Hampshire Labor Unity Table
before the
Vermont House Committee on General and Housing
on
Proposal 3
April 16th, 2024**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Alan Raff, and I am here on behalf of the New Hampshire AFL-CIO, its over 50 affiliate organizations and nearly 40,000 members. I would like to thank the committee for allowing a Granite Stater to come before you and discuss Proposal 3 with you, and provide you with the perspective of a neighbor from the east and give you an idea of what working families have to be worried about, for the foreseeable future in my state. I testified via Zoom for the Senate Committee hearing and am thankful that I am able to provide written testimony to the Vermont House.

This proposal will do something for the people of Vermont that my state's elected leaders are unlikely to do for at least a decade. That is not to say that I won't be fighting for and towards a future where a similar proposal could become enshrined and recognized as a basic right in New Hampshire, but we are nowhere as close as your state is to doing something like this that is good for all people, from all backgrounds, and all experiences. Not only is it good for all Vermont workers. It's the right thing to do

because it is an opportunity for Vermont to lead the way as a model for respecting and protecting the right to join together and be fairly compensated for your work.

In today's society, almost all of us have to work. And many times we have to have multiple jobs at the same time, to be able to provide for our families and try to ensure that they have the opportunities that we have or had. It is just a fact of life. No matter what form that work takes, no matter how old, or young, or experienced, or educated you are, we should all be recognized as having the right to be compensated for our work.

The right to property is fundamental to our constitutional and national ethos. Why shouldn't the right to join together with your peers and work together to ensure that you are paid for the work that you perform? It seems like a pretty basic concept, which might be a reason that someone who is being critical of this proposal might say: "this is a given, and already exists in our economic and social systems. We don't need to amend our constitution for this." And I understand that perspective. Of course I do.

But when you really need the work that you get, and the work that you can get doesn't pay you what it should, you feel like it should be your right to join with your fellow colleagues and work together to make sure that you are treated fairly and adequately compensated for your professional services whatever they may be. It is an unfortunate fact of human history that many times we don't realize how important a right was until that right is taken away from us by those with the power and motive to do so. Right now, under your leadership, at the state, local, and federal levels the people of Vermont are being stewarded admirably and from what I witness, adeptly. But someday, by no fault of your own, or the working people of Vermont, this may not be the case.

Vermont has the opportunity to make sure that workers now, and workers in future generations will have a right to join together, without fear of retribution or loss of their livelihood. This is something that I literally lose sleep over year in and year out in New Hampshire. Now, of course, there are always efforts to chip away at the rights of every day workers by more powerful and wealthy businesses because they are in the business of making money, they will always try to maximize their profits. And this is not meant as a criticism. It is just meant as a statement. And the majority of businesses, from small local businesses to large businesses are not purposely trying to exploit workers, but yet, we are all very well aware that it happens and that depending on the situation it can ruin a month of your life or decades of your life. But in New Hampshire, without fail, every legislative biennium, the General Court will have to vote on a version of “Right-to-Work.”

For over forty years every legislature has brought forward an iteration of “Right-to-Work.” And every year, no matter what party has the majority, a bipartisan coalition of legislators have come together to defeat each piece of legislation. I am sure that other witnesses will give you the full history of “Right-to-Work,” and insidious inception. But

I’m here to talk about the time that my state wastes... and the financial fear that people in New Hampshire have to live with every day because they are not protected by a minimum wage, there is no state prevailing wage, and their ability to collectively bargain is one of the only tools that have enabled them to ensure that are being fairly paid for their work, that their family is safe with health insurance, and that they are able to plan for retirement in their later years. It should not have to be considered a privilege to be afforded the opportunity to plan for a future for you and your family that extends further than your next paycheck.

Every year, organizations spanning from across the political spectrum waste hundreds of thousands of dollars to argue the value of collective bargaining units, and the existence of organized labor in our workplace. Instead of solving issues like our opioid epidemic, we spend time, money, and political capital to ensure that workers can work together to make sure they are paid fairly.

Every year, in both chambers of our legislature the rights of workers are attacked, and we have to spend months to protect things that are basic protections for most Americans. For example, every year, there are efforts to reduce the time that a worker is able to draw unemployment benefits, this year, we had to fight a bill that tried to reduce the maximum amount of weeks of unemployment to 6 weeks. More than any other group of workers, our public sector workforce has to defend their basic rights as workers. These are the people that help keep our state functioning and safe at the most basic levels. I'm talking about our state, town, and city employees, our emergency response workers like police and fire fighters. They spend their careers simply trying to serve the public, but here in New Hampshire, the time that they have outside of their profession is often spent advocating for their rights as employees. Vermont has the ability to protect these workers and their rights for future generations, which will also ensure that they can do their jobs of serving the public for our future generations.

It takes courage to be one of the first states to admit a reality that I think we all believe, that workers deserve not only the freedom of association to collectively bargain with their colleagues for compensation, but also that in today's world, that right needs to be protected, and should be protected. My family and best friends live throughout Chittenden County, and I have gotten to know a lot of Vermonters. And something that I think all of the Vermonters that I know believe is that people deserve to have dignity in their work and should have the dignity of work. This is not thought of as

fundamental across the border, and that is why I am urging you to do this because it is within your power to do so, and that it can be, and with your courage will be, a right that more states feel an obligation to enshrine in their legal infrastructure.

This is not about politics or political parties. It isn't about that in my state either. The New Hampshire AFL-CIO membership is pretty evenly split when it comes to partisan breakdown, but I will tell you that all of our members understand the importance of what Prop 3 stands for, and how important that right is to all of our members, no matter who they voted for President, Governor or Mayor. They know that every legislative session they have to take the day off of work to come and speak to their elected representatives about how they deserve to be able to make their own choices about who they contract business with or work for. I know that if we were able to get a CACR, our version of a Proposal through the New Hampshire legislature, that the people of New Hampshire would vote to add these rights to our constitution.

However, we cannot seem to muster the required number of our 424 member legislature to agree on anything, and these rights are certainly no different. But my probably naïve, but certainly optimistic hope is that if states like Vermont step up to modernize the rights that we consider fundamental, then other states will join in this transition and augmenting of that constitutional infrastructure in our country. And maybe in time, a state that is more similar to New Hampshire than it is to Vermont will make the decision that Vermont has the opportunity to make with Proposal 3, and maybe by the time that happens, the leaders that we elect to represent our interests in New Hampshire will see that this is a fundamental right for the future of the modern workforce. Although, as you are well aware, New Hampshire is usually the last one to the good idea bin in New England.

It is my hope that you will pass this proposal through your committee, hopefully unanimously, and that Vermont will show the rest of the country why Vermont is a special state, because you respect the dignity of all people, and all workers. As fate has it, after I finish, I am on my way to our State House in Concord to speak to Representatives about this year's iteration of "Right-to-Work" because tomorrow it will, once again, come to the House floor for a vote. Thank you Senators for your time, consideration, and your service to Vermonters. I would be happy to take any questions you have.