

Professional Firefighters of Vermont

Proposal 3 – Right to Organize and Collectively Bargain

On behalf of the 300+ Active and Active Retired Career Firefighters in Vermont that are members of the Professional Firefighters of Vermont I am honored to provide testimony on the importance of this proposed amendment to the Vermont Constitution. The importance of passing this important piece of legislation and enshrining the right to organize and collectively bargain is a major step forward in protecting workers in the State of Vermont.

- Being active in a Union for over 33 years and being the President of the Professional Firefighters of Vermont, I often hear from other leaders around the Country of attacks on labor, with legislation that restricts collective bargaining some entities along with “Right to Work” legislation.
 - Our counterparts in New Hampshire are faced with this legislation being presented every legislative session and it takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to stop. While they have been successful at beating back these pushes, they do take a toll on addressing other issues that are important to the health and safety of their members.
- Recently, Utah passed legislation that severely gutted public sector unions. Utah H.B. 267 successfully passed and was signed into law that prohibits public employers from:
 - Recognizing public sector unions as bargaining units and prohibits them from entering into collective bargaining agreements
 - Excludes new members of unions from obtaining retirement benefits from public employers
- North Carolina and South Carolina have similar laws that ban public sector unions from collectively bargaining with their employers
 - Texas and Georgia also have these laws but fire and police have been exempted, unfortunately all other public sector unions are not
- Other states have seen similar legislation presented, but luckily they have stalled, at least temporarily. Legislation similar to Utah’s have been presented in Idaho and Montana
- “Right to Work” legislation, while it sounds like it is pro-labor, is in fact, anti-labor and States that have enacted this legislation have experienced:
 - Lower overall wages compared to non-right to work states
 - See reduced benefits for employees

- See an increase in work-place related injuries and death
- When employees are allowed to union and collectively bargain they are able to address these inequalities and provide for safer work environments and equipment, better pay and benefits
- Proposal 3 does not dictate or require anyone to Unionize, that is still an individuals personal right. It does prevent legislation preventing or hindering unionization and collective bargaining from being instituted in the State.
- Vermont has always prided itself on being a leader on freedom and rights and this would only solidify that position. This proposal would show that Vermont appreciates workers and their rights.
- The ability for Unions to thrive and workers to have a collective voice on workplace issues benefits all. Historically this voice has addressed and promoted many positives for workers as a whole:
 - Reduced work hours to the current 40 hour work week
 - Work-place safety improvements to include child labor laws
 - Improved benefits such as health/dental care, retirement, and paid leave

In closing, thank you for the time to speak on this historic and important piece of legislation and hopefully I will be able in the very near future to brag about how Vermont has enshrined in its Constitution the right for workers to organize and collectively bargain for their conditions of work.

Respectfully

Christopher Dube, President

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