

Legislation Text

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Urging the United States Senate to pass Senate Bill 1306, the Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2019 (also known as the “PRO Act”), and affirming the right of workers to form unions and organize for higher wages, family-sustaining benefits, as well as safety, dignity, and respect at their workplace.

WHEREAS, Unions are the backbone of the working class. They are crucial for ensuring that all jobs are *good* jobs-ones that guarantee a living wage; a safe, dignified workplace; meaningful benefits; and protection from discrimination and unfair dismissal; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia City Council, the Pennsylvania State Legislature, and the United States Congress all must act to balance the scales between workers and employers. Workers must not be treated as costs to contain; rather, they must be recognized as the foundation of each and every workplace in the City of Philadelphia and the country; and

WHEREAS, Every person-regardless of citizenship status or type of work-deserves the freedom to form a union. Workers must be provided legal protections so that they may voice concerns about working conditions and organize without fear of retaliation; and

WHEREAS, Research shows that unionized workers can set industry standards for wages and benefits that provide a floor for all workers, regardless of whether they are formally part of a union. Even more, union members earn on average 11.2 percent more in wages than their non-union peers; and

WHEREAS, Unions have been shown to be especially integral to lifting the wages of workers of color. Unionized Black workers are paid 13.7 percent more than their non-union peers, and unionized Latinx workers are paid 20.1 percent more than their non-union peers; and

WHEREAS, As such, unions can be a driver for directly addressing racial disparities in pay. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, unions and collective bargaining have reduced the Black-White wage gap and should continue to do so; and

WHEREAS, Unions also work to combat and bridge the gender pay gap, as hourly wages for union-represented women are 5.8 percent higher than their non-union counterparts; and

WHEREAS, Unions have played a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Union contracts provided pre-existing benefits that have kept workers and their families afloat. Unionized workers are more likely to address workplace hazards that have arisen from COVID-19. As a result, they have been at the forefront of innovative solutions and policies that ensure safe and healthy workplaces. Over the course of the pandemic, union workers have negotiated for additional pay, paid sick leave expansion, and job security and preservation. Their deep commitment to economic justice has continued to set standards, against the odds; and

WHEREAS, Despite the clear benefits of belonging to a union, just 11 percent of U.S. workers, and 16 percent of Philadelphia residents, are union members; and

WHEREAS, Despite the clear benefits of union membership, federal labor law has unfairly given employers an enormous advantage in union elections while setting unreasonably high barriers for workers to elect to join a union. It also makes it relatively easy for employers to suppress and quash organizing efforts with little to no consequence. For example, workers who lead protests against unfair working conditions cannot bring lawsuits if they are terminated in retaliation, and, even if they are ordered to reinstate workers and provide lost wages, no further financial or legal consequences may be issued; and

WHEREAS, Employers are often given wide latitude to pursue vigorous anti-union campaigns. Researchers at the Economic Policy Institute have shown a rise in intimidation tactics-such as requiring anti-union seminars and increased threats of discipline-that discourage workers from exercising their right to organize; and

WHEREAS, President Joseph Biden has stated that expanding union membership is an essential component of a stronger, fairer economy. As he announced in March 2021, “Unions put power in the hands of workers. They level the playing field. They give you a stronger voice, for your health, your safety, higher wages protections from racial discrimination and sexual harassment...Unions lift up workers, both union and non-union, but especially Black and Brown workers”; and

WHEREAS, The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act seeks to level the playing field as workers organize for fairness and dignity in their workplaces. The bill, which was approved by the House of Representatives in February 2020, currently sits in the Senate, where it has 42 co-sponsors; and

WHEREAS, The PRO Act would protect pro-union workers from being retaliated against for their advocacy, limit the ability of companies to employ coercive tactics, end the rampant abuse of workers who are misclassified as “contractors,” and ensure that majority rules apply in union elections free from employer interference; and

WHEREAS, The legislation would also establish further penalties for employers who violate labor law, as well as override “right to work” laws which aim to gut unions by allowing workers to gain access to union benefits without paying dues; and

WHEREAS, One job should be enough; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia City Council has made historic strides in advancing protections for both union and unrepresented workers. Passage of the PRO Act at the federal level will strengthen our continued work to uphold legal protections so that workers may demand and gain access to justice in their workplace; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Urges the United States Senate to pass Senate Bill 1306, the Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2019 (also known as the “PRO Act”), and affirms the right of workers to form unions and organize for higher wages, family-sustaining benefits, as well as safety, dignity, and respect at their workplace.