

“Right to Work” Laws Hurt Everyone

AFL-CIO Position: Oppose any legislation seeking to make Illinois a “Right-to-Work” state or to allow for local “Right-to-Work” zones. Oppose any legislation seeking to ban Fair Share fees in the public sector.

- The term “right to work” is a misnomer that has little to do with the right of a person to seek and accept gainful employment. It does not give anyone an actual right-to-work. Instead it makes it harder for workers to have a union in their workplace.
- “Right to work” laws set up a welfare system by which people don’t have to pay for the benefits of union representation that they receive. It prohibits a labor union from negotiating union security clauses with an employer. Union security clauses and fair share fees ensure that everyone in a union-represented workplace contributes to the cost of the union’s activities from which they benefit. Otherwise workers who pay their dues are forced to “subsidize” those workers who don’t.
- Banning Fair Share fees in the public sector has the same impact on public employees as “Right-to-Work” laws have on private sector workers. In both cases, non-members can refuse to contribute anything toward the cost of the union representation from which they benefit. The intent is not to help workers, but rather to weaken unions and prevent workers from coming together to improve their lives.
- Unions help to raise the standard of living for all workers. When unions are weakened and their ranks reduce, all workers suffer. The quality of life is worse in right to work states. Wages are lower, poverty levels are higher, people are less likely to have health insurance, and resources for education are lower.
 - On average, workers in states with right to work laws make \$5,971 (12.2 percent) less annually than workers in other states. (*Bureau of Labor Statistics*)
 - Poverty rates are higher in states with “right to work” laws (14.8 percent overall and 20.2 percent for children), compared with poverty rates of 13.1 percent overall and 18.3 percent for children in states without these laws. (*US Census Bureau*)
- In a report from the University of Illinois on right to work – “Right to Work has an obvious negative impact on union membership. Additionally, for female, African-American, and Latino workers, right to work tends to have negative impacts on real hourly wages. It would remove structures that reduce racial and gender inequality.”
- In January, Moody’s released an economic report for the State of Illinois. It stated “Also debatable is whether right-to-work laws enhance economic growth even in circumstances where they do help attract businesses to a state. Since laws that hurt unions shift the balance of power from employees to owners, they tend to erode wages and lead to a more uneven distribution of the gains of economic growth.”
- As Moody’s correctly points out, passing Right-to-Work laws or banning Fair Share fees has one goal—shifting the balance of power away from workers and to employers. Laws are already in place allowing workers the freedom to choose whether to join a union. Unions are in workplaces because a majority of those workers have chosen union representation. Whether or not they support the union, all workers in the workplace benefit from the gains the union makes and the rights that the union establishes.
- From the University of Illinois report: “When isolated and measured against other job creation variables, right to work has no proven record of stimulating meaningful economic growth. By comparison, Illinois would reap far greater economic benefits by increasing its **investment in education and skilled-based training.**”
- Other findings from the University of Illinois policy brief, if a right to work law passed in Illinois:
 - Employment would increase by a very small 0.4 to 0.55 percent, but this increase may cease over a few years.
 - Hourly wages of African-American workers would drop by 2-9 percent over time.
 - Hourly wages of Hispanic workers could drop by as much as 8 percent over time.
 - Hourly wages of women would fall by 2-7 percent over time.
 - **Approximately 107 additional Illinois workers would lose their lives due to work-related injuries in the construction sector over 10 years. The rate of workplace deaths is 54.4 percent higher in states with right to work laws (BLS).**
 - After the third year of adoption, the five-year reduction in state income tax revenues would be between \$1.4 billion and \$1.6 billion.
- **Right to Work laws are just another way for corporations to knock the bottom rung off the economic ladder that people use to climb out of poverty to the middle class.**