



Testimony in Support of HB 2016, The Public Worker Protection Act
Senate Workforce Committee, 3-5 minutes

John Larson, April 18th, 2019

Chair Taylor, members of the committee, for the record my name is John Larson and I am the president of the Oregon Education Association. We represent more than 45,000 educators in every corner of the state in Oregon's K-12 schools and community colleges.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Public Worker Protection Act. I believe its passage is critical to support working people across the state.

Unions are critically important to protect and represent workers around the world. As the state's largest education association, we represent educators. But our primary goal is to ensure that every student has access to a world-class education.

Anti-union organizations want to privatize public schools and hand them over to companies that know nothing about the students in our communities and only care about making profits.

The Freedom Foundation and organizations like it oppose basic core tenets of improving education. In Washington state, they recently fought against bills to lower class size and a bill to lift the minimum wage.

The bill before you today, House Bill 2016, is extremely important to ensure that in Oregon we remain a state where the basic principles of worker protections and collective voice are preserved.

Together in union, educators are able to better advocate on behalf of their students for better learning conditions, school funding, and other necessary improvements.

We represent over 212 locally negotiated contracts in school districts and community colleges around the state. Most of what House Bill 2016 would do is codify best practices that are already in place - and commonplace - in our contracts and districts.

We merely seek to ensure that these best practices are accessible to workers around the state, and lift up the remaining educators who don't yet have strong access to union representation.

One example that is particularly poignant for educators I work with: this bill would help protect public employees from harassment from outside groups by protecting private personal information.

Over the past two years we have countless examples of educators who have had their private information shared to the Freedom Foundation and other anti-worker organizations whose primary purpose by their own admission is to "destroy unions" and to harass educators and other public servants who are represented by a labor union.

We have many educators who have reported being at home on a weekend and being harassed on their doorstep because they are a union member. They are trying to relax with their families during all too rare, much needed downtime with their families, and they are subjected to this harassment simply because they are educators and work in the public sphere.

Just a few weeks ago, educators received harassing text messages to their personal cell phones from the same organization.

Working in public education should not mean your are exposed to this kind of harassment.

I want to impress upon you how critical this bill is in a time of increased anti-worker and anti-union activity around the nation. Groups like the Freedom Foundation seek to undermine the voices of Oregonians and educators -- and we must support public workers' right to stand up for themselves, collectively bargain contracts, and work together in union to advocate for themselves and their students.

This is a foundational Oregonian value, and simply a question of whether you stand with educators and other public workers or stand with shadowy corporate forces that are focused (unsuccessfully) on privatizing public education and other services for their own gain.

OEA is stronger than ever, even in the face of the Janus decision last year. Our members are more organized and engaged in advocating for students than I have ever seen.

Unions around the nation are stronger than ever as workers everywhere are struggling to get by. There is growing interest in joining organizations like ours to fight together for what students need to succeed, fight for our schools, fight for fair pay, decent health care, and dignified retirement. With the support of the legislature to ensure Oregon protects these foundational aspects of worker protections, we will remain a strong voice for students and educators for decades to come. Please support the Public Worker Protection Act.