

INTERRELIGIOUS FAITH GROUPS' LETTER TO U.S. SENATORS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE (PRO) ACT

July 20, 2021

Dear Senator,

We, the undersigned national faith-based organizations, urge the swift passage of the Protecting the Right to Organize Act. Earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 842 and it is time for the Senate to send this critical legislation to President Biden's desk.

As an interfaith community, we believe all workers should be free to act in solidarity with one another and make their voices heard. Our belief in the intrinsic worth of both work and workers leads us to strongly support the PRO Act, which will strengthen and expand the right of workers to bargain collectively, form unions, and engage in collective action without fear of retaliation from their employers. Such assurances are also better for the employers as they contribute to better productivity, mutual collaboration, and sustainability.

Our current labor laws are no longer effective in protecting the lives and dignity of workers and fall woefully short of allowing workers to effectively advocate for their needs from a position of mutuality with employers. As union membership has fallen due to counter-productive laws and amendments, inequality has skyrocketed leaving the working class with little constructive power over their own economic security; and thus, also harming sustainable business models.¹

The PRO Act addresses these current inadequacies by empowering workers to effectively exercise their freedom to organize and bargain. Critically, it also ends employers' practice of punishing striking workers, strengthens the National Labor Relations Board and allows it to hold corporations accountable for retaliating against workers, and would help us collectively do better for all our needs by repealing "right to work" laws which are a harmful legacy of the Jim Crow Era.

"Right to work" laws originated in the 1940s as a way to reinforce Jim Crow by maintaining labor segregation and further exploiting workers of color. These laws allowed states to ban unions from requiring workers who benefit from collective bargaining to help pay for bargaining costs. Today, 8 of the 10 states with the highest percentage of Black residents have "right to work" laws, which prohibit fair share fees.² These restrictions strip funding and bargaining power from unions which have a devastating effect on the economic stability of people of color.

¹<https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/>

²<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472910/systematic-inequality-economic-opportunity/>

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke on these laws, preaching that “In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans such as ‘right to work. It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights. Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions for everyone... Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer, and there are no civil rights.’”³

The PRO Act is more than labor reform, it is civil rights legislation. A union contract is generally one of the best tools we have to close the racial and gender wage divide. A union contract also often ensures dignity and due process for workers, regardless of where they were born, who they are, or what industry they work in. Removing barriers to organizing and bargaining is critically important to workers who have been marginalized or those working in segregated fields such as the service industry. Such barriers are forms of structural violence. Finally, expanding collective bargaining will increase protections for women, people of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community in areas where our laws still fall short. Such attention to those most marginalized benefits all of us as a community.

With all of this in mind, it is not surprising why the PRO Act and unions, in general, are popular. Research shows that more than 60 million people would vote to join a union today if given the opportunity—that is nearly half of all nonunion workers.⁴ Union density increased in 2020 amid the federal government's failure to protect workers from the COVID-19 Pandemic.⁵ Finally, polls have found that union approval stands at 65 percent which is one of the highest marks in the last 50 years.⁶

When left without regulation and enforcement, corporations, employers, and the government have forced the working class to accept poverty wages and stymied the enactment of necessary benefits such as paid family and medical leave. They have allowed income inequality to exponentially rise, leaving essential workers and their families with little to show for their labor.

A commitment to human dignity, worker justice, and the common good of all demands support for the PRO Act. This legislation would better the lives of tens of millions of workers and their families by creating an economy that is rooted in solidarity and supports working people as well as sustainable business models. We urge you to act and vote in the best interest of workers, employers, and the economy: Pass the PRO Act today.

³ <https://labornotes.org/2018/07/racist-history-right-work>

⁴ <https://iwer.mit.edu/2018/08/30/who-wants-to-join-a-union-a-growing-number-of-americans/>

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>

⁶ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/318980/approval-labor-unions-remains-high.aspx>

American Friends Service Committee
Catholic Labor Network
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces Dorothy Day
Catholic Worker, Washington DC
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

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