



**INTERNATIONAL
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September 11, 2019

VIA EMAIL

To: All Members of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives

Re: Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, S. 1306/H.R. 2474

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the 775,000 active members and retirees of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), I am writing to urge you to co-sponsor S. 1306 and H.R. 2474, the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. This legislation would restore the original intent of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to protect workers' right to organize a union and negotiate higher wages and better benefits.

The right to organize and collectively bargain is a fundamental right of all Americans and the bedrock of a capitalist society that allows the benefits of a growing economy to be shared broadly between workers, supervisors and employers. These fundamental rights, however, have been steadily undermined in recent decades. As a result, union membership has dropped precipitously from over 20 percent in 1983 to just 10 percent in 2018. During the same period, incomes for the bottom half of income earners in the United States have grown by just one percent between 1980 and 2014 while income for the top one percent increased by 205 percent. Today, income inequality has reached levels that predate the Great Depression.

The reason membership in labor unions is declining is not due to eroding interest in family-sustaining wages and benefits – it is because employers have the upper hand. Workers attempting to unionize often face a hostile legal environment and are commonly intimidated by aggressive anti-union employers. Outdated labor laws have failed to provide Americans with protection from this anti-worker onslaught against collective bargaining.

The PRO Act would help even a vastly tilted playing field by invoking stronger remedies for violating federal law. Currently, there are no penalties on employers who illegally fire or retaliate against workers attempting to form a union. This legislation establishes compensatory damages for workers and penalties against employers when they fire or retaliate against workers.

The Economic Policy Institute found that three-quarters or more of private employers facing unionization hire union avoidance consultants to quash the campaign. The PRO Act would streamline the National Labor Relations Board process so workers can petition to form a union and get a timely vote without their employer interfering or delaying the vote. It would also prohibit companies from





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forcing workers to attend mandatory captive audience meetings as a condition of continued employment.

Even if workers do vote for union representation, more than half do not have a collective bargaining agreement a year later. The PRO Act would establish a process for reaching a first agreement when workers organize.

Employers often misclassify workers as supervisors to deprive them of their rights under the NLRA while allowing management to skirt minimum wage, Social Security and workers' compensation laws. The PRO Act tightens the definitions of independent contractor and supervisor to crack down on misclassification and extend NLRA protections to more eligible workers.

Unions provide skills training and continuing education to their membership, as well as a more stable and safer workforce. A worker covered by a union contract earns more than 13 percent more in wages than a peer with similar education, occupation and experience in a non-union workplace in the same sector. Where unions are strong, wages are higher for typical workers – union and non-union members alike.

Research shows that workers want unions, evidenced by the large gap between the share of unionized workers – 10 percent – and the share of workers that would like to have a voice on the job – 48 percent. The PRO Act would take a major step forward toward closing that gap.

There is no better path to the middle class than a union job with the security it provides in salary, health benefits and retirement income. Family sustaining middle class jobs are the route to economic security, providing the crucial financial cushion that protects so many families on the edge of economic disaster once a job loss or medical emergency hits. Unions provide economic independence and self-sufficiency, and an expanding middle class is good for the economy and the country.

The IBEW enthusiastically supports the passage of the PRO Act and our members encourage your co-sponsorship of this critical legislation.

Sincerely yours,

Lonnie R. Stephenson
International President

LRS:lgd

