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Bringing Democracy to Pennsylvania Labor Unions

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Introduction

In the public's eyes, labor unions have traditionally been the voice of working people. However, a closer look at how unions run their own organizations reveals a stunning lack of accountability by union leadership toward union members. For example, in Pennsylvania, fewer than 1 percent of public school teachers voted for the union representing them. In nearly every case, the original election authorizing a particular union, usually the Pennsylvania State Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers-Pennsylvania, took place some 40 years ago. The case is similar for workers in other government jobs.

Not only are government unions entrenched, but so are their leaders. Political scientist Daniel DiSalvo has noted many top government union presidents spend years or even decades in office before any change in leadership. Gerald McEntee was president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees from 1981 to 2012. Former Service Employees International Union head Andy Stern was in office for 14 years until 2010. Albert Shanker headed the powerful American Federation of Teachers for an astonishing 23 years, from 1974 until 1997, the year he died.

Undemocratic government unions have an impact on workers, but society also has a stake in ensuring they are run effectively. Something as seemingly mundane as salary raises or larger pensions, DiSalvo notes, is basically advocacy for higher government spending in one area over another: "In short, whether they work bottom-up, through collective bargaining, or top-down, through lobbying and electioneering, public-employee unions seek to fundamentally alter government policy."¹

In the last 30 years, Pennsylvania's overall union membership has fallen by half, to 12.7 percent of all workers. Among government employees, however, it has risen slightly from 49.3 to 52.7 percent.²

With union membership strong in the public sector, it is imperative that government workers be able to regularly choose the type of union they want, or if they want a union at all. In addition, individual workers who don't want union representation should be allowed to negotiate their own compensation and working conditions. This would eliminate the "free rider" objection union leaders raise when discussing workers' right to abstain from joining a union. Reforming both state public sector law and common practice in these ways would ensure all government workers are fairly represented.

¹ Daniel DiSalvo, "Are Unions Democratic? The Internal Politics of Labor Unions and Their Implications," Manhattan Institute Civic Report 91 (September 2014). http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_91.htm#notes.

² Barry T. Hirsch and David A. MacPherson, "Union Membership, Coverage, Density, and Employment by State and Sector, 1984 and 2014," unionstats.com.

State Law Regarding Government Employees and Unions

The Public Employee Relations Act of 1970 (PERA) outlines how and when labor unions may represent government workers, such as teachers, city employees, social workers, and others. The law prescribes the following rules:

Certification

A union may be “certified”—that is, officially recognized as an employee representative—in two ways:

- Through a joint employer-employee request for certification when a majority of workers support a particular union. If employees are interested in having a different union represent them, the alternative representative must garner at least 15 percent support. If the requisite support is attained, an election is automatically triggered.³
- Through a workplace election, which is the more widespread method. For this to happen, a union must demonstrate 30 percent of workers in the bargaining unit are interested in having a particular union become their “exclusive bargaining representative.”

Under PERA, a certified union represents all the workers in a defined unit, such as professional staff in a school district. That means the union negotiates pay and working conditions and adjudicates workplace disputes for union and non-union employees alike. To appear on the ballot, a competing union must have the support of 1 percent of the workers in a bargaining unit, while 10 percent of employees must show interest before they can participate in defining the bargaining unit. Once an election is held, a simple majority of the ballots cast is required to certify a union.⁴

Decertification

If employees would like to remove a specific union as their official workplace representative, they must petition the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board.

- Employees must demonstrate that 30 percent of workers in their bargaining unit are interested in a decertification election.
- Decertification requests may be submitted only when a collective bargaining agreement is about to expire, no sooner than 90 days and no later than 60 days before the agreement’s expiration date. Furthermore, decertification cannot proceed if the workplace in question held an election to determine representation within the preceding 12 months.
- Employers may also start decertification proceedings by “indicating a good faith doubt” that the current union represents a majority of workers.⁵

³ Rules and Regulations of the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, § 95.11, <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552985&mode=2#95.11>.

⁴ Rules and Regulations of the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, § 95.12 and § 95.13, <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552985&mode=2#95.12>.

⁵ Rules and Regulations of the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, § 95.21 and § 95.22, <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=552985&mode=2#95.21>.

The Impact of Existing Union Representation Requirements in Pennsylvania

PERA became law in July 1970. According to the law’s terms, unions already representing workplaces as of January 1, 1970 were not required to undergo certification through an election. In other places, a simple request for certification was enough to make a union the official representative because the union clearly represented a majority of workers. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, which had represented the city’s public school employees since the 1960s, is the most prominent example.⁶

Elsewhere, certification elections took place across Pennsylvania following PERA’s passage. In fact, unions in 427 of the state’s 500 school districts—a staggering 85 percent—were certified in 1970 or 1971. An additional 39 were certified from 1972-79, with fewer and fewer each successive decade, as the table shows. In all, *less than 1 percent* of some 104,600 current public schoolteachers had a say in selecting or even affirming the union representing them.

A glance at the top 20 school districts by teacher population reveals similarly dismal results. Only 25 long-serving educators out of more than 24,158 classroom teachers were employed at the time of their union’s certification. In all, nearly three-quarters of Pennsylvania’s school districts do not employ a single teacher who voted in their union’s certification election.

It’s a similar experience for government workers employed by the commonwealth. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME, represents more than half of these workers, about 30,000. Only half a percent of all employees were present in 1974 for AFSCME’s last major certification election.

Other major unions such as United Food and Commercial Workers 1776 and the Service Employees International Union 668 also held their last elections for state employees about 40 years ago. The 9,300-strong Pennsylvania State Corrections Officers Association held its union in 2001. Even so, only one-third of current employees were eligible to participate in that election.

Most Recent School District Union Certification	
Years	No. of Districts
1960s	2
1970-71	427
1972-79	39
1980s	13
1990s	4
2000s	3
	488
Sources: School districts and Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board upon Right to Know requests. Data were unavailable for 12 of 500 school districts.	

⁶ 1970 Act 195 § 602, <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1970&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=195&chpt=6>; interviews with Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board in August 2015.

Largest Pennsylvania School Districts by Teacher Workforce			
School district	Total no. of teachers	Current teachers employed at election date	Percent of current teachers employed at election date
Philadelphia	8,086	0	0%
Pittsburgh	1,868	2	0.11%
Central Bucks	1,157	1	0.09%
Allentown City	961	0	0%
Reading	952	0	0%
Bethlehem Area	894	2	0.22%
North Penn	838	0	0%
Downingtown Area	815	1	0.12%
West Chester	801	1	0.12%
Erie City	780	0	0%
Council Rock	779	0	0%
Lancaster	774	0	0%
Upper Darby	774	0	0%
Pennsbury	750	4	0.53%
Central Dauphin	732	0	0%
Pocono Mountain	694	0	0%
Scranton	685	5	0.73%
Lower Merion	634	0	0%
Hazleton Area	632	1	0.16%
North Allegheny	552	0	0%
Totals	24,158	17	0.07%

Sources: Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, school districts and Pennsylvania Department of Education

Certification of State Worker Unions				
Union	Certification date	Current workers employed at election date	Total employees	% of current employees
UFCW 1776	1971	1	1,480	0.1%
AFSCME	1974	163	30,562	0.5%
PSCOA	2001	3,412	10,218	33.4%
SEIU 668	1972	22	9,392	0.2%
ISSU	1971	2	705	0.3%
Total		3600	52,357	6.88%

Sources: Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board and Pennsylvania Office of Administration.

The Right to Re-elect: Reforming Union Representation

Given that less than 1 percent of current Pennsylvania government employees were potentially able to vote for their union, it is unclear whether existing labor representatives have the support of most of the workers they claim to represent. In presidential and congressional races, Americans are accustomed to selecting leaders every two to four years. For labor organizations, which affect every aspect of government employees' working lives, regular elections should also be mandatory.

The Public Employe Relations Act currently *allows* for elections to be held if petitioners file for an election during a 30-day window before a collective bargaining agreement expires.⁷ Such contracts for public school teachers and other government workers across Pennsylvania typically run from three to five years. Instead of simply allowing elections in rare cases, PERA should be amended to *require* re-elections.

To ensure the best-quality representation for workers, such reforms should include the following provisions:

- Employees would have at least three choices on their ballots: keep their current union, change to a different union, or have no union representative.
- To qualify as a challenger to the incumbent union on the ballot, a labor representative must show 10 percent support in the bargaining unit. As current law prescribes, the option of “no representative” should also be included.
- To become or continue as exclusive bargaining representative, a union must win a majority support from employees in a bargaining unit. If no clear winner emerges from the first election, a run-off should be held between the top two choices.
- Union certification elections would be mandatory at the expiration of every collective bargaining agreement, or every four years, whichever comes first. An extension of an expiring collective bargaining agreement or the signing of a new one should not affect this election trigger.
- Notwithstanding regular full elections, employees should be able to start decertification proceedings at any time. If 30 percent of the employees in a bargaining unit support a decertification election, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board will hold a fresh election with a “yes” or “no” ballot option to the certified union.

The Wisconsin Precedent

Wisconsin has been called “the birthplace of public sector unionism,” authorizing government unions in 1959. In 2011 it became the only state in the country to amend its labor laws, making union recertification elections mandatory every year in government workplaces.

Under Act 10 of 2011, annual recertification elections are held in the fall for public school employees and in the spring for other government workers. Unions wishing to recertify as

⁷ 1970 Act 195 § 605(7)ii states: “Petitions for elections may be filed with the board not sooner than ninety days nor later than sixty days before the expiration date of any collective bargaining agreement or after the expiration date until such time as a new written agreement has been entered into. For the purposes of this section, extensions of agreements shall not affect the expiration date of the original agreement.”
<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1970&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=195&chpt=6>.

exclusive bargaining representatives must file an election petition by a deadline established by the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC). If they are already certified, they do not need to demonstrate a showing of interest, although any new union wishing to be added to the ballot must demonstrate a 30 percent showing of interest through authorization cards.⁸

If a union fails to file an election petition, it is automatically decertified for the following year. To win recertification, a union must achieve at least 51 percent of the votes of all the employees in the bargaining unit, not simply a majority of the ballots cast.⁹ This creates a built-in incentive for employees to vote for labor representation if they desire it, and equally legitimizes a union as majority representative.

To pay for annual elections, Act 10 requires unions to pay a fee based on a sliding scale shown here. According to WERC, cost estimates have proven fairly accurate, with the agency able to cover the cost of elections every year with the fees collected. In 2014, for example, the cost to run union elections with some 70,000 voters was about \$100,000, roughly \$1.50 per voter.

Wisconsin Union Recertification Election Fees		
No. of bargaining unit employees	Fee	Minimum cost per voting employee
1-100	\$200	\$2
101-250	\$350	\$1.40
251-500	\$500	\$1
501-1000	\$750	\$0.75
1,001-3,000	\$1,500	\$0.50
3,000+	\$2,000	\$0.67

Source: Wisconsin Administrative Code, Employment Relations Commission 70.03, http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/erc/070/70.

Once a union files an election petition with WERC, the employer must provide a list of workers in the bargaining unit who are eligible to vote. The union may challenge the list, and WERC finalizes it. Determining eligibility constitutes the bulk of WERC’s certification election work. Rather than conduct the elections itself, it contracts with the American Arbitration Association to carry out the actual voting and ballot counting. WERC is able to post election results usually within hours once voting ends.

Employees have 20 days to vote during an election, which is conducted by phone and online. Each voter is assigned a unique identification—a combination of his or her last name and social security number. Once a voter has phoned or logged into the system, the ID automatically routes him or her to the correct election.¹⁰

Act 10’s recertification and collective bargaining reforms have had a deep impact on the state’s government unions. A look at school districts alone shows that many educators and support staff chose to decertify, whether passively through unions not participating in elections, or actively by failing to provide majority support.

The table below tells two interesting stories. First, when workers strongly desire union representation, they vote for it—roughly nine out of 10 unions in all four elections held so far have recertified. Second, at the same time, fewer schoolteachers and workers overall are unionized. At most so far, only half of eligible unions (counting by bargaining units) have chosen even to participate in recertification elections. By default, this means they are officially decertified, and workers in that school district have no union.

⁸ Wisconsin Administrative Code, ERC 70.03, http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/erc/070/70 and ERC 71.03, http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/erc/070/71.

⁹ Wis. Stat. § 111.70(4)(d)3.b.

¹⁰ Interview with Peter Davis, Chief Legal Counsel/Team Leader of the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission, Aug. 14, 2015.

Wisconsin Public Schools Union Certification Results				
Election year	No. of participating teacher and support staff unions	No. of recertified unions	Percentage	Recertified unions as % of all school bargaining units
2011	206	177	86%	21%
2013	408	386	95%	47%
2014	305	280	92%	34%
2015	301	279	93%	33%

Sources: Wisconsin Employment Relation Commission; Milwaukee Journal Sentinel; MacIver Institute; Najita and Stern, eds, *Collective Bargaining in the Public Sector: The Experience of Eight States*. No 2012 election was held because of a court challenge to the recertification requirement. In the last column, the total number of education bargaining units in Wisconsin is estimated at 825, per union tallies available in 2001.

Independent Local Unions

Requiring regular recertification also has the potential to create more choices for workers in union representatives. Currently, large national teachers’ unions such as the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers represent most American public schoolteachers. Across the country educators strongly support their local union—which concentrates on negotiating pay and working conditions—while expressing less satisfaction with the political bent of state and national affiliates. A 2003 Harris Interactive Survey of over 3,300 public schoolteachers found that 94 percent in districts with collective bargaining would voluntarily join their local union, but only 80 percent would join their state union. Even fewer, 67 percent, would join their national union.¹¹

Anecdotal evidence from Pennsylvania educators supports the national picture. Through teacher interviews, Commonwealth Foundation has found several educators are unhappy with the political and advocacy efforts of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) and National Education Association (NEA) but appreciative of their local union’s work.¹²

One such teacher is Chad Lister, an 11-year social studies educator in Dauphin County. In the 1980s, long before he entered the classroom, the teachers’ union in his school district was run locally and independently of the NEA and its state affiliate, the PSEA. Lister has never joined because he finds the big teachers’ unions bureaucratic and too political. “They’re ineffective,” Lister explains. “For the amount of dues you’re paying, over \$600, I’m not sure what you’re getting. They’re spending on political causes and donating to political action committees.”

However, Lister believes strongly in local control and responsibility. If he had the option of supporting an independent local in his school district, he says he could “switch to that very easily” and become a union member for the first time in his career.¹³

¹¹ Terry M. Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America’s Public Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 66-70.

¹² For first-person teacher testimonials, visit FreetoTeach.org.

¹³ Interview with Chad Lister, September 9, 2015.

Twenty-nine year elementary school teacher and librarian Julie Raab agrees. She is a non-union fee payer who has long supported independent local unions. In fact, she opted to pay dues just to her local union, even though this did not entitle her to member benefits. Under the current system of unified dues, however, she is not allowed to join her local union affiliate alone. She must join all three levels—local, state, and national—or not join at all.

“I was totally against the political leanings of PSEA and NEA, but wanted to support my local colleagues and the work they were actually doing ‘on the ground’ for us in our district as employees,” Raab said. “So I regularly just sent the local a check for the equivalent of their share of the annual dues, knowing it didn't entitle me to anything other than showing my support...I would love to go back to only supporting them and no one else.”¹⁴

Compounding teachers’ frustration is how much of their dues leaves their school district for the bigger affiliates. For example, in 2014-15, basic PSEA dues for a full-time teacher were \$689. Of that, \$506 or 73 percent went to the state affiliate, and \$183 or 27 percent went to the National Education Association.¹⁵

An analysis of the PSEA’s annual financial filing with the U.S Department of Labor shows a mere 17 percent of the union’s spending goes towards “representational activities.” Moreover, about 36 percent of each teacher’s dues to the PSEA and NEA goes towards political activities and lobbying. This can be calculated using the union’s own figures on the difference between regular union dues of \$689 and the \$444 fair share fee that strictly covers collective bargaining and representation.¹⁶

Some local affiliates charge their own portion of dues, but not all do. Even so, the amount is often a fraction of what the state and national union affiliates receive. Local dues in 2014-15 for Allegheny Intermediate Unit Education Association, for example, were \$200, or just 22 percent of the current total.¹⁷

Under these circumstances, it is no surprise teachers around the country are seeking to launch local, independent, and unaffiliated unions that represent only their school district. One of the most prominent examples is Roscommon Teachers Association in Michigan, headed by 23-year teacher Jim Perialas.

Three times in 20 years, teachers in his district attempted to decertify the Michigan Education Association and NEA and recertify independently. They succeeded only on the third attempt, in 2012. The first, most immediate impact was discovering that they could simply contract directly with an attorney for legal counsel on collective bargaining and other issues. By cutting out the middleman of the state and national union affiliates, Roscommon was able to slash annual union dues from \$980 to just \$600 per teacher.¹⁸

In testimony to the Pennsylvania House State Government Committee in 2014, Perialas emphasized that his union now has 100 percent participation and transparency. He said he and

¹⁴ Interview with Julie Raab, September 4, 2015.

¹⁵ Pennsylvania State Education Association-National Education Association Enrollment Form 2014-2015, <https://www.psea.org/uploadedFiles/JoinPSEA/Enrollmentform.pdf>.

¹⁶ Free to Teach, “Where Do Your Union Dues Go? A Look at Teachers Union Spending in Pennsylvania, 2013-14,” <http://www.freetoteach.org/page/where-do-your-union-dues-go>.

¹⁷ Allegheny Intermediate Unit Education Association, <http://aiuea.psealocals.org/>.

¹⁸ John Boudier, “Podcast: A Local-Only Teachers Union?”, January 27, 2015, <http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/policyblog/detail/podcast-a-local-only-teachers-union>.

his coworkers had grown disillusioned with the MEA/NEA, which he described as bureaucratic and unresponsive to members.¹⁹

“The primary reason we left is we had no voice,” Perialas said during the hearing. “Most of us, including myself, are not anti-union and we believe in the collective bargaining process.”

Switching to a local-only independent union has attracted teachers not only in Roscommon but also in Kansas. Mark Laurie is the president of Riley County Educators, an independent union that decertified the NEA in Riley County Unified School District 378 in 2009. Teachers decided to decertify because NEA membership was dwindling, and eventually no high schoolteachers were at the negotiating table with the school district. An unrepresentative minority of teachers was bargaining for the whole staff’s compensation, and by rules had to exclude non-members from union meetings.

“Everybody’s included now,” said Laurie, who described the situation leading to decertification as an issue of fairness. Dues have gone from hundreds of dollars a year to just \$60 annually.²⁰

Regular recertification elections could smooth out a cumbersome process by eliminating the decertification requirement. By simply appearing on the ballot as an alternative at election time, local-only unions can become established in school districts and other government agencies where employees prefer them.

Independent Bargaining

Pennsylvania’s Public Employe Relations Act states a union “selected by public employes in a unit appropriate for collective bargaining purposes shall be the exclusive representative of all the employes in such unit to bargain on wages, hours, terms and conditions of employment.”²¹

The provision means the union must represent all employees in a government workplace, regardless of whether the workers are union members or not. Two state “fair share fee” laws require those non-members to pay their union a fee—a percentage of regular dues—to cover the costs of representation.²²

The problem with this legal framework is it forces union representation on non-member workers who do not want it. Right-to-work corrects this coercion by allowing individual employees to opt out of paying fair share fees. However, while it fixes the employee side of the equation, right to work does not address union leaders’ complaints about “free riders”—non-member employees they are required by law to represent, but who do not pay any dues.

¹⁹ Pennsylvania House of Representatives, State Government Committee, June 5, 2014, “Presentation on House Bill 1507 to Amend Act 195 to Eliminate the Collection of Public Sector Union Membership Dues and Political Contributions by Public Employees,” p. 144-155.

http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/tr/transcripts/2014_0096T.pdf.

²⁰ Interview with Mark Laurie, August 4, 2015.

²¹ 1970 Act 195 § 606,

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1970&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=195&chpt=6>.

²² Act 84 of 1988, which covers school employees, and Act 15 of 1993, which covers state, municipal, city, county and other government workers.

A simple legislative solution for both unions and employees is to require non-union employees to represent themselves individually over wages, benefits, working conditions, and dispute resolution. This reform would remove the “exclusive representative” burden from labor unions’ shoulders and hold them responsible only for full union members. This change would keep exclusive representation privileges intact in that workers would either be a member of the certified union representative or be on their own—competing unions in a single bargaining unit would not exist.

In Pennsylvania, more than 55 percent of the state’s 600,000 government employees are covered by union representation, while 52 percent are union members.²³ Reform allowing individual self-representation would thus affect about 20,000 non-union workers, creating a fair system for both unions and employees. This two-way reform has been proposed in Michigan.²⁴

Creating Informed Union Members

Under the federal Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, labor unions with any private sector workers must file annual financial reports with the U.S. Department of Labor outlining their activities. Reporting requirements became much more stringent and detailed under the Bush administration in the early 2000s.²⁵

Today, these reports must reveal large unions’ income and assets, salaries and compensation of employees and officers, administrative and overhead expenses, spending on political activities and lobbying, and spending on representational activities on behalf of union members. Such disclosure has given union members a clearer idea of how their union dues are spent.

Unfortunately, no such reporting requirement exists for public sector unions with only government workers. Agency fee payers, however, get to see an annual description of union financials, usually called a “Hudson Notice.”²⁶ Pennsylvania’s *Fair Share Fee Law* requires annual notices to nonmembers to “gauge the propriety” of the fee being charged.²⁷

For the PSEA, the notice often spans more than forty pages, with financial statements from both the PSEA and the NEA. Union members should have access to the same kind of information as non-union workers.

To further increase government union accountability, unions should be legally required to send a simplified annual notice to all members detailing their key financial indicators. Such a notice should include the following essentials:

- The total number of members and agency fee payers in the union
- Total revenue collected from union dues and fair share fees, respectively

²³ Barry T. Hirsch and David A. MacPherson, “Union Membership, Coverage, Density, and Employment by State and Sector, 2014,” unionstats.com.

²⁴ F. Vincent Vernuccio, “The Next Evolution of Worker Freedom: Freeing Workers and Unions from Forced Representation,” June 19, 2015, <http://www.mackinac.org/21444>.

²⁵ W. James Antle III, “Hard Labor: Elaine Chao, Reformer,” *Labor Watch*, March 3, 2009, <http://capitalresearch.org/2009/03/hard-labor-elaine-chao-reformer/>.

²⁶ The 1986 U.S. Supreme Court case *Chicago Teachers Union v. Hudson* provided a way for agency shop non-union workers to ascertain how unions calculate fair share fees. This was to ensure that no part of the fee goes towards ideological activities that might infringe on workers’ First Amendment rights. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/475/292/>.

²⁷ Pennsylvania Fair Share Fee Law, <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/US/PDF/1993/0/0015..PDF>

- Total expenditures for the year, broken down by such categories as representational activities, overhead costs, and political activities and lobbying. Brief definitions of what each category covers should also accompany the expenditure breakdown.²⁸
- Salary, benefits, and total compensation for the union executives
- Information on employee rights, including:
 - An explanation of worker rights as provided under the Pennsylvania Public Employee Relations Act, and
 - Next date or calendar window permitting resignation from a member’s local union.

Clear financial disclosure will inform and educate union members more fully about how their dues are being used, strengthening the quality of union representation.

Conclusion

Government unions play a large role in influencing public spending and policies at the state and local level, but they are surprisingly undemocratic within their own organizations. The practice of recertifying a union—similar to regular elections in our democratic political system—is almost non-existent for workers. As a result, choices of union representatives are limited, as is the ability to forego union representation in many workplaces. Legislative reform to strengthen democratic processes within government unions makes for better worker representation and more accountable public sector unions.

About the Author and the Commonwealth Foundation

Priya Abraham is a Senior Fellow with the Commonwealth Foundation.

The Commonwealth Foundation is Pennsylvania’s free market think tank. The Commonwealth Foundation transforms free-market ideas into public policies so *all* Pennsylvanians can flourish.

²⁸ U.S Department of Labor, “Instructions for Form LM-2 Labor Organization Annual Report,” November 2010, <https://www.dol.gov/olms/regs/compliance/EFS/LM-2InstructionsEFS.pdf>.



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