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June 22, 2011

Dear Members of New Jersey State Assembly:

Re: Oppose A-4133: Eliminates The Right to Collectively Bargain Health Care

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO opposes A-4133 because it eliminates the long standing tradition to negotiate health care benefits for public employees. We respectfully ask you to vote no on this bill and instead to respect the collective bargaining process.

Through collective bargaining, the standard of living has been raised for all workers, not just unionized workers. The collective bargaining is about negotiating – similar to what members of the legislature do in their own caucuses. It's about trying to make progress for all parties involved through negotiations.

The current negative economic conditions were not created by middle class workers, they were created by the greed of Wall Street profiteers, yet it is our members that are being blamed. Union members are sensitive to the harsh economic environment we are currently operating in. After all, union members and their families must balance a family budget just like everyone else. They respect and understand that taxpayers "bottom line" is important. That is why union members – in both the public and private sectors, have a long history of bargaining in good faith during difficult economic times and the collective bargaining system has worked well. Our public employee unions continue to illustrate this today. They have submitted a responsible cost savings proposal regarding health care. The initial proposal put forth to begin negotiations is estimated to save taxpayers \$230 million. However, their proposal was never responded to at the bargaining table by the Administration. This and all other recommendations concerning health care, should be negotiated at the bargaining table, not legislated.

For decades, organized labor has been built around the core values of collective bargaining. It has been recognized as the best vehicle for negotiating conditions of employment including health care benefits, so that timely and fair contracts can be agreed to by all parties. It was a hard won right and is long established in U.S. and International law.

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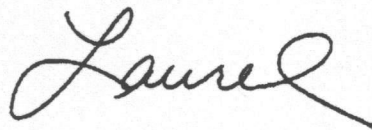
The ability to engage in collective bargaining is an American tradition and is a central tenet fundamental to the core beliefs of the labor movement and our nation's democratic ideals. Therefore, it is paramount that these proposals are negotiated, not legislated. Only through collective bargaining, do workers have a voice – and if you vote yes on this bill, you will be voting to silence the voices of approximately 500,000 workers.

This is a terrible moment for New Jersey's working class. This is a terrible moment for teachers, police, firefighters, state and local government workers, and all middle class workers that serve our communities through public service. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO stands for collective bargaining and refuses to go backwards on workers' rights in this state. If we have learned anything from history over the years, we know that when labor has no role, democracy has no future. Every member of the State Assembly, Democrat and Republican alike, should reject this bill and instead stand with working families and respect the right to collectively bargain.

Sincerely,



Charles Wowkanech
President



Laurel Brennan
Secretary-Treasurer

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OPEIU:153