

Media Release

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Lawsuit Seeks to Overturn Attack on Public Workers

Seven public-sector unions file a lawsuit claiming HB 1413 is an unconstitutional overreach meant to weaken collective bargaining and workers' rights

ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI - Today, seven labor organizations representing a broad range of public-sector employees, including teachers, patient care professionals, maintenance workers and some public safety employees, filed a lawsuit contesting the constitutionality of House Bill 1413 (HB 1413) and requesting injunctive relief. The legislation is aimed at destroying collective bargaining rights and lowering wages.

HB 1413 was part of a slew of unpopular, anti-labor measures signed into law by the then-governor Eric Greitens only hours before he resigned. Greitens signed this assault on employee rights along with a number of other bills like prevailing wage decreases and a measure moving so-called "right-to-work" to the August ballot, where it was overwhelmingly defeated.

Ultimately, the bill only serves to disrupt collective bargaining practices for public sector workers, like public school teachers. Among other things, it prohibits bargaining over most working conditions; allows employers to unilaterally change labor agreements; silences the voice of public employees from public debate; and creates unnecessary and burdensome bureaucratic hoops in order for unions represent their members. The law hurts their ability to bargain for better wages and working conditions and will lead to disastrous consequences for these workers and government services, like public education. State employee pay in Missouri already ranks last in the country.

"This is another attempt by legislators backed by corporate interests to attack our right to speak up about student needs, class-size, wages and benefits," said Lori Sammelmann, an instructional coach in the Ferguson-Florissant school district. "Missouri teachers are already some of the lowest paid in the country. These lawmakers are out of touch with the actual realities and responsibilities we face as public school teachers and would rather silence us and undermine our ability to negotiate for better learning conditions and better pay, while simultaneously giving corporations and the wealthy more power in our political system."

In addition, the law arbitrarily and selectively discriminates against certain types of public-sector employees. It exempts police, firefighters, and other public safety employees represented by a law enforcement or public safety union, but not those same employees if they are represented by a trade union. This is a purposeful effort to pit workers against each other in an attempt to attack collective bargaining, and will only undermine their ability to do their jobs and serve the public interest.

The law's real purpose is to weaken and ultimately destroy public employees' constitutional right of union representation. Missouri is only one of 4 states that expressly protects the right of collective bargaining in its state constitution. The lawsuit filed today asserts that HB 1413 violates that fundamental right.

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