

Christopher French  
Vassalboro  
LD 187

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor Committee, my name is Christopher J. French. I am a proud lifelong public servant, employee of the Maine Public Utilities Commission, union member and shop steward MSEA-SEIU local 1989. In addition to my professional endeavors I am a husband and father of two daughters. Born and raised in Maine, my wife and children have lived in the Town of Vassalboro since 2013. In 2024, the townspeople deemed it fit to reelect me to serve a second term on the select board.

Politically I identify as a right leaning, fiscally conservative independent. I, however, recognize the value of promoting and supporting access to union membership. We know through years of empirical data, union membership unequivocally increases the financial stability along with access to quality health care for its members, and influences wages for competing non-union industries throughout our nation and the State of Maine.

It is my position that Right to work (RTW) laws are designed to disrupt and influence the US economic system by weakening and undermining collective bargaining. Additionally RTW laws suppress wages, reduce access to quality healthcare, and limit financial opportunity for those individuals and families who seek the solace, collective strength, voice, and stability labor unions have provided members since the creation of the National Labor Relations Act (NRLA).

Philosophically speaking conservative politicians and their supporters have a propensity to eliminate or erode membership within the ranks of labor unions. The enactment of Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, empowered states to adopt RTW laws. By March 27, 1947, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee effectively added RTW to their state laws. With the exception of Virginia, citizens residing within the boundaries of these states earn a lower annual income compared to the national average, and maintain union membership by percentage in the bottom third of the country.

An article authored by Kabir Dasgupta and Zofsha Merchant and published within the FEDs Notes: Understanding Workers' Financial Wellbeing in States with Right-to-Work Laws September 8, 2023 reviewed a twenty year period (2000-2020) and assessed the earnings of primed aged individuals (25-64) for the six years preceding and six years post implementation of the RTW law in the following states Oklahoma, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Although the data suggested that employment increased, there was a statistically significant decline in annual wages by \$1,900.00 to all prime aged adults. Union participation also declined on average by 2 percent each year after the adoption of RTW laws.

The non-technical summary the National Bureau of Economic Research sponsored "Impacts of Right-to-Work Laws on Unionization and Wages June 2022 authored by Nicole Fortin, Thomas Lemieux & Neil Lloyd." Reviewed the effects of RTW laws implemented in five states (Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Kentucky) that were adopted between 2011-17 focusing on Unionization rates and wages. Researchers associated an overall 4% decrease in union participation and a 1% decrease in income five years after the implementation of RTW laws. The greatest impact of RTW laws hit the following industries: construction, education, and public administration who experienced a 13% reduction in unionization and 4% reduction in wages over the same 5 year period. This has a disproportionate impact towards women and public-sector workers.

Finally let us cast our sites to our friends from Michigan who for decades labor data correlated a strong history of union membership to wages 6 percent greater than the national median. Unfortunately in 2012 Michigan lawmakers passed RTW leading to a precipitous decline in union membership, suppressed wages, and income inequality with nearly half the earnable income shifting to the top 10%.

I would like to remind the committee the very act of employees seeking unionization requires the potential bargaining unit to decide through a democratic process spelled out in the NLRA, specifically “the predicate for workplace representation by a labor organization is its designation or selection for the purposes of collective bargaining by the majority of the employees in a unit appropriate for such purposes.”

Maine families cannot afford poorly timed obstacles and roadblocks to prosperity. Please accept my testimony declaring my opposition to LD 187.