



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 25, 2015

WCC TESTIFIES ON RIGHT TO WORK LEGISLATION

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference offered insights from Catholic teaching on work and labor during a hearing by the Senate Labor Committee relating to a proposal to allow workers the option of not joining a labor union when they are employed in a workplace represented by that union. The proposal, Senate Bill 44, known as a “right to work law,” drew a large number of witnesses to the hearing.

Supporters of the bill argued workers should have the freedom to decide whether or not to be represented by a union. They also stated that right to work laws make businesses more competitive, foster job growth and business relocation, and polls indicate a majority of respondents support these laws. Opponents of SB 44 contended right to work laws undermine unions by encouraging “free riders” who benefit from higher wages and safer working conditions without paying for the organization that secures them. They also suggested such laws suppress wages and benefits and cited data of their own that right to work laws are not vital to attracting businesses to a state.

The WCC testimony began by articulating why the Church speaks on issues of this nature.

“The Catholic Church has long insisted that while it does not have technical solutions for every human problem, it does have a moral duty to speak out on matters that involve the life and dignity of the human person and the common good,” said WCC Executive Director John Huebscher. “The Church’s moral voice on social matters is based on its Catholic social teaching, developed over centuries and based on Jesus’ call to nourish the hungry and thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the ill and imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-39).”

The WCC testimony cited the discussion of economic justice and the relationship between workers and employers contained in the WCC’s 2015 Public Policy Positions document:

“The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good....”

Workers have the right to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. Workers also have responsibilities – to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers and employers should not only advance their own interests, but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all.”

“Meeting these standards can be a challenge. But the Church insists that a just economic order is possible,” Huebscher observed. “When the interests of both employee and employer are balanced, such that neither tries to damage the other and each cooperates for the advancement of justice and the common good, everyone prospers.”

The testimony concluded by urging lawmakers to assess the bill in light of three questions:

- Does SB 44 benefit the common good?
- Does it provide a just balance between the interests of workers and the interests of employers?
- Does it protect the natural right of workers to assemble and form associations?

The Committee recommended the bill for passage following the hearing and the Senate approved the bill the following day. The Assembly is expected to approve the measure next week.

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