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Oregon Public Worker Protection Act passes Senate

HB 2016: Protects workers' rights to participate in labor unions

SALEM – The Oregon Senate voted to enact protections for public workers by putting into law best practices already established in collective bargaining agreements around the state.

House Bill 2016 – which passed on the Senate floor today – allows public employees to enter into agreements with unions and authorize deductions for membership or payments in lieu of dues. It also makes changes to the Oregon Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act regarding authorized activities and compensation for designated representatives, unions' access to employees included in their bargaining units and unions using employer facilities and equipment.

"We have seen a multitude of efforts to discourage union membership, in Oregon we still recognize the importance of fair pay for a hard day's work and the vital role labor plays in this state," said Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Milwaukie), who carried the bill in the Senate. "This bill clarifies how unions can serve their memberships in the public workplace. It also specifies how union officials can help their bargaining unit members make certain workers are treated fairly."

The bill repeals the Oregon statute that employees must provide written notice to the public employer when authorizing or revoking payroll deduction for dues or payment in-lieu-of-dues. Instead, the bill will allow employees to enter into agreements with labor organizations to authorize deductions.

One section of the bill requires paid leave for designated representatives to perform certain union activities during working hours, including investigating and processing grievances and other workplace-related complaints; attending investigatory meetings and due process hearings; attending labor-management meetings; testifying in legal proceedings if subpoenaed; and performing other duties, of agreed to by the public employer in a collective bargaining agreement. The bill also allows negotiation of release time for employees to act as union officials inside and outside the workplace.

“The core provisions of the bill reflect many standards that have existed in my work setting for many years and served to best encourage labor peace as well as a more cooperative atmosphere,” Oregon Nurses Association member Lillian Nickerson testified to the committee. “As an OHSU nurse my new employee orientation included an hour-long roundtable orientation with an ONA representative. During this meeting I was able to learn about some of the benefits I would receive as a union-member, including how ONA representation works throughout the organization, where to turn if conflict arises and how the union supports safe labor practices.”

House Bill 2016 now goes to the House of Representatives for concurrence.

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