



PHILADELPHIA

FEDERATION of TEACHERS

TO: MEMBERS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FROM: JERRY T. JORDAN, PRESIDENT, PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

RE: HB 2571 and PA Legislature Priorities

September 6, 2018

HB 2571: Another attack on working people

The PFT is OPPOSED to HB2571 and any legislation aimed at vilifying workers.

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers represents more than 12,000 hard-working teachers, counselors, nurses, secretaries, paraprofessionals, librarians, and school personnel. These educators work every day to advocate—both in and out of their school buildings—for the schools our children and their educators deserve.

Regarding the specifics of HB2571, it is not surprising that organizations such as the Fairness Center and Americans for Prosperity are in favor of the bill. They have long sought to attack unions, particularly those representing Pennsylvania's educators. They have brought lawsuits against us, and in fact, the head of the Fairness Center, who testified at the Committee hearing on HB2571, actually compared our union to segregationists.

The bill is unnecessary. With the Janus decision having been handed down by SCOTUS, this bill is another attempt by the legislature to confound and confuse union members and nonmembers, and increase the burden on individuals and organizations seeking to better the working and learning conditions of our educators and students. Janus is the law of the land, and it is unfortunate that the legislature is spending taxpayer funds to look for additional ways to attack workers.

The reporting protocols outlined in the bill make little sense, and we question the intention behind solidifying requirements around those that are already nonmembers. There is absolutely nothing heavy handed about the way the Federation signs up new members, nor have we ever coerced someone into a voluntary union membership. Further, political contributions are an entirely separate, and of course voluntary, contribution. Members affirmatively opt-in to both union membership and political contributions, if they so desire.

And there's a broader context to our concern with the hearing, the bill itself, and the legislature's priorities.

Over the past two weeks, educators and students have been subject to absolutely inhumane conditions in sweltering classrooms, with little forethought given to the negative impacts on learning. In a school district comprised of largely old, un-air-conditioned buildings, many of which have windows that do not open fully or even at all, or buildings that retain heat in their brick oven like interiors, our educators and students have been struggling mightily. Educators have been taken by ambulance to the hospital. Students are vomiting from heat exhaustion. Asthmatic students and educators are experiencing respiratory challenges. Teachers are bringing changes of clothes to work to change mid-day. I personally witnessed one young boy lying on the cool concrete floor on the third floor of his school. When his teacher gently urged him to come into class, he replied, "but the floor is cool." This is simply unconscionable.

This brings me to the tone deaf hearing that took place in the State Capitol yesterday on Bill 2571.

It's disappointing that instead of seeing the broad picture, which is that students in our public schools—particularly students of color, students experiencing poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs—are being profoundly shortchanged, our legislature seems more interested in attacking the unions that advocate for the public schools our students deserve than in looking for ways to provide desperately needed public education funding.

The legislature would have been better served holding an emergency hearing on mechanisms that could be utilized to fund PlanCON immediately. The school facilities study was years in the making, and even though its official completion was in May, there has been no effort to fund it. That is disgraceful.

An overwhelming majority of Philadelphia's educators opt-in to union membership because they know that we are stronger together and that our advocacy is on the right side of history. **Our fight for the public schools all of our children deserve is one rooted in a deep moral imperative that drives the work that we do every day.** They know that ensuring safe drinking water, lead and asbestos free buildings, that demanding change when our buildings are unbearably hot or cold, takes collective action and commitment.

Conclusion

I would urge the legislature to repudiate the unnecessary and frankly offensive Bill 2571, and instead work to convene emergency hearings on facilities issues in Philadelphia's public schools, and in other districts that are facing similar issues. PlanCON must be funded, and legislators from across the Commonwealth should be laser focused on ensuring equity and access to a thorough and efficient public education, as outlined in the Pennsylvania State Constitution.

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