

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

April 20, 2026

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I urge you to sign the discharge petition for the Faster Labor Contracts Act (H.R. 5408), introduced by Representative Donald Norcross.

The country is in dire need of wide-ranging, pro-worker labor law reform. Working families are finding it more difficult than ever to get ahead. The wage growth seen in the wake of the pandemic has stagnated, particularly for those on the lower rungs of the income ladder, while the cost of living continues to rise. Workers once had the bargaining power to ensure their pay rose with productivity, but employers have decoupled those things. For decades, the wage-productivity gap has widened and inequality has grown. This year, labor's share of GDP, relative to profits, is at its lowest level on record—meaning there is plenty of room for wages to grow. They have not because of corporate greed and policy choices that undermine workers' ability to organize and exercise their full bargaining power.

There is a simple private sector solution to these problems. Give working people the freedom to organize and bargain for a better life.

More than 50 million workers say they would join a union if they could—and it is no wonder why. Through unions and collective bargaining, workers maximize their bargaining power and improve their lives. Unions transform low-wage jobs into stable middle-class jobs, secure safer workplaces, ensure fair treatment and give workers a real voice on the job. Union members earn an average of 12.8% more than nonunion workers, and this wage premium is even higher for women and workers of color, thereby closing race and gender income gaps. Median wealth of union households is higher than in nonunion households; union members are more likely to own homes; and in states with high union density there is not just a multiplier effect but also a spillover effect where nonunion workers experience higher wages and greater stability. Unions also raise standards across industries, benefiting members and nonmembers, and have long set the benchmark for decent working conditions because their bargaining demands reflect what working people want. Unions play a central role in building the middle class, training workers, strengthening the social fabric of communities and expanding economic opportunity.

For the sake of the economy, the law should not just protect the right to organize and bargain collectively. It should facilitate and encourage the exercise of that right. But the law fails to do so. Its weaknesses open the door to union-busting. And that union-busting has kept too many workers from freely exercising their full bargaining power and solving problems collectively. For too long, unscrupulous employers have run roughshod over working people's rights. It is time to change that.

Fully freeing working people to exercise their bargaining power, and not just improve their lives but unrig the economy, requires a number of fixes to the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA): making representation elections free and fair; ending the scourge of captive audience meetings; strengthening enforcement and imposing financial penalties on employers who break the law; repealing Jim Crow “right to work” laws; ending worker misclassification; ensuring all the employers with ultimate control over working conditions are at the bargaining table; and making sure bargaining—especially first contract bargaining—is done in good faith by employers. All these critical reforms (and more) are found in the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. They are badly needed.

Congress can pass one provision of that bill right now. This provision provides the option to refer first contract bargaining to binding arbitration. Union-busting consultants do not concede defeat when workers successfully run the gauntlet and win union representation. Instead, these firms continue to bill employers for a new phase in the union-busting campaign—exploiting the NLRA’s weaknesses to drag out bargaining as long as possible. Their goal is to avoid reaching a contract for a year or more, hoping that workers will abandon their demands and give up their union..

H.R. 5408 addresses this problem by establishing a timeline from bargaining to mediation and, if necessary, binding arbitration. These provisions discourage delay and promote good-faith bargaining. Based on experience with similar rules in other countries, this binding arbitration option rarely results in arbitrated contracts. Instead, it acts as a powerful incentive for the parties to bargain in good faith and in earnest to reach a mutually acceptable contract as soon as possible. That is how the law should work.

Ensuring that workers who choose to bargain collectively actually receive good-faith bargaining from their employer would be an important first step, necessary but not sufficient, to fixing the nation’s broken labor laws. Please sign the discharge petition for H.R. 5408 and pass this bill. It is also critical that Congress move forward with the rest of the labor law reforms—the full PRO Act—all of which are needed to empower private sector workers to solve problems and unrig this economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody Calemine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

Jody Calemine
Director, Government Affairs