

WEAC: Wisconsin public employees file lawsuit challenging constitutionality of law banning collective bargaining

Posted on Thursday, Nov 30, 2023

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MADISON, Wis. – Today, Wisconsin public employees filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a state law which eliminated the freedom to engage in collective bargaining for most public sector workers.

Wisconsin statute unconstitutionally discriminates against most public sector workers, denying their freedom to negotiate with employers on subjects beyond base wages and to be represented by a union without jumping through the hoops of burdensome annual recertification elections, the lawsuit asserts. It excludes many sworn law enforcement officers and other public sector workers including corrections officers, teachers, and education support personnel. Plaintiffs include the Abbotsford Education Association (WEAC/NEA), AFSCME Local 47, AFSCME Local 1215, Beaver Dam Education Association (WEAC/NEA), SEIU Wisconsin, Teaching Assistants Association (TAA/AFT) Local 3220 and Teamsters Local 695.

Union members are filing the lawsuit now because of the dire situation that exists in our workplaces. Low pay, staffing shortages and worsening working conditions are hurting our ability to deliver public services to the communities that count on us every day. Just this week, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel [reported](#) on toxic work culture where workers face regular harassment with little protection and the Wisconsin Policy Forum [released a report](#) on falling teacher pay, a leading factor of staffing shortages in schools.

With worker organizing on the rise, and public support for unions growing, workers

are calling out Wisconsin law for what it is – blatant discrimination that limits workers’ freedom to earn a fair wage, provide for their families, advocate for safety on the job and enjoy a secure retirement.

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“State-employed workers, such as graduate assistants like myself, should be guaranteed the same rights as public safety workers. We contribute so much to our communities, and we deserve a voice on the job,” said **Maddie Topf, a graduate assistant at University of Wisconsin Madison**. “Legal action to restore collective bargaining rights to all state employees is one way to secure the livelihood of working people in Wisconsin,” said **Nina Denne, a graduate assistant at University of Wisconsin-Madison**. They are co-presidents of AFT-Wisconsin’s Teaching Assistants Association.

“I worked for 13 years as a firefighter paramedic in Wisconsin, where I had the freedom to negotiate; however, when I became law enforcement for the Department of Natural Resources, I immediately lost my right to a voice on the job,” said **Ben Gruber, a conservation warden, president of AFSCME Local 1215 and plaintiff in the lawsuit**. “Every single day, I am proud of the work we do to protect the public. We are an essential part of our state’s public safety system, often working in dangerous conditions and making arrests miles away from any backup. We are certified as law enforcement by the same state board, but my co-workers and I are denied the same union rights enjoyed by other public safety personnel. It’s time that public sector workers across Wisconsin have our freedoms restored to us.”

“WEAC stands in solidarity with our union partners in restoring negotiation rights,” said **Betsy Ramsdale, a teacher and co-president of the Beaver Dam Education Association**. “For over a decade, the deck has been stacked against educators like me. Teachers and support staff work in partnership with parents to teach students about compromise and collaboration, but school districts aren’t required to do the same. It’s frustrating and demoralizing, and a huge reason Wisconsin doesn’t have enough staff to meet student needs.”

“I’ve worked as a Building Service Technician for almost 17 years, helping maintain around 30 school buildings in Racine. My co-workers and I have lived and worked under Act 10 for twelve years now and have been forced to recertify our decision to organize a union each year. The end of Act 10 would mean that we would have a

real say again in our retirement plans, healthcare and time off — without the threat of loss of our union every year,” said **Wayne Rasmussen, a member of SEIU Wisconsin who works for the Racine Unified School District.**

“The Teamsters Union stands shoulder-to-shoulder with our labor allies in the fight to secure collective bargaining rights for all workers. Wisconsin’s public sector workers deserve a seat at the table, to be able to bargain for good wages, benefits, and working conditions,” said **Larry Wedan, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 695 in Madison.**