

My name is Jane Ladley, and I served as a Pennsylvania public school teacher for 25 years. My career teaching and mentoring kids was incredibly rewarding—it felt like building the future one piece at a time. It's a privilege to share my story in support of the labor reform bills under consideration. I believe that teachers and other public employees should know about their right not to belong to or pay agency fees to a union.

In my final year of teaching, the Pennsylvania State Education Association made it mandatory to pay the union as a condition of employment in my district. Thanks to a Pennsylvania law that protects religious objectors such as myself, I was able to designate a charity to receive my money instead of the PSEA—at least, that was what the law said.

I chose a group that would give deserving high school seniors scholarships for demonstrating knowledge and interest in the U.S. Constitution. It was a nonprofit, fully sanctioned under federal and state law. Unfortunately, the PSEA effectively blocked my choice, claiming it was “too political” to teach children about the Constitution. The next group I chose was also Constitution-focused, but this one engaged directly in public service by providing curriculum materials and promoting education for young people. This nonprofit was also rejected by the union. Yet every pay period, the union would take money from my paycheck and put it in an escrow account.

At this point, it was becoming clear that the union would not recognize my freedom to select who received my money. The union was using state law to pressure me into selecting a charity that aligned with their values instead of mine. So, I filed a lawsuit with the help of public-interest law firm the Fairness Center, and after several years of litigation, the PSEA finally refunded me the money they took out of my paycheck. The case is now before the Commonwealth Court.

Unfortunately, the fundamental issue that led to my lawsuit remains a problem today: most public employees have no real choice when it comes to which union, if any, represents them. No teacher should have to deal with a union that works against their deepest personal values.

I'm sharing my story so that you can see why it is important to protect the rights of teachers and public employees. The bills under consideration will give public-sector employees a choice when it comes to union membership and workplace representation. This will put the power back in the hands of employees themselves, not the organization that purports to speak for them.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit my testimony.

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