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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the House Labor and Industry Committee's hearing on public sector union reform legislation. My name is Jenn O'Leary and I am an elementary school librarian in the Boyertown Area School District.

I love working with my students, I love the communities/districts I have worked for, and I love being an educator. I did not love being part of a union. I didn't like the time when the union asked me to go "work to rule" —meaning no extracurriculars or after-school help for students—during contract negotiations because I felt like that hurt kids. I felt like the union always told me how to stand in solidarity with their views, but never went to bat for me when I was a member. I especially didn't like how the union spent my money on politicians and political issues I didn't agree with. I didn't want to be told who to vote for and what political agenda I should support. I always thought I had to join and stay in the union for insurance purposes, but I found out that wasn't true.

In November 2020, after 17 years of working in the public school system, I decided I wanted to resign from the Pennsylvania State Education Association and the National Education Association. This led me to email my workplace union representative to ask how to resign from union membership. She told me that I'd missed the window to withdraw and that if I wanted to resign, I had to contact the union by October 1st of a given year, or my union membership contract rolled over "like a cell phone contract." She sent me a blank copy of a union card which had the resignation date requirement in fine print. Although I asked for a copy of the card with my signature, it was never provided to me.

I spoke with some friends at church and was able to find help that gave me the determination to try to get out of the union immediately. I wanted to exercise my First Amendment right to not pay dues to an organization when I disagreed with what they stood for.

In December 2020, I sent a letter by certified mail to PSEA telling them I wanted to resign my membership and asking them to stop withdrawing dues from my paycheck. The letter came back to me with a big orange sticker from the post office that said, "box closed." I was confused because I had sent the letter to the address on PSEA's website. I double checked just to be sure I had the right address.

In early January 2021, after the holidays, I sent a second letter, also by certified mail, to the address on PSEA's website. It was returned to me again with another big orange sticker that said, "box closed." I emailed PSEA and told them I was trying to send them a document and asked them to confirm their mailing address for their headquarters in Harrisburg. They sent me back the same address with a slightly different zip code and no P.O. Box number. I sent them a third letter by certified mail with the updated address. At this point it was February 2021. Three weeks went by and I didn't receive a response to my letter, so I contacted the Fairness Center, a public interest law firm that helps public employees.

While I was waiting to find out if the Fairness Center could help me, I finally received a reply from the PSEA in early March 2021. It was a form letter asking me to reconsider and stating how PSEA is strong because of "members like you"—but at this point I just wanted out. The Fairness Center wrote a strongly worded letter to the union. PSEA's lawyer responded with an email stating that although I owed them money, they would let me out, stop dues deduction, and not require me to pay. While I'm grateful for the Fairness Center's help, the PSEA should not have forced me to get lawyers involved

before they allowed me to act on my constitutional rights. The fact that they did shows the need for lawmakers to address these issues with legislation.

I started the process to leave the union in November and it took me until April to finally be free. This process is unfair to public employees. You're never told of the fine print on the union contract saying you can only leave the union a certain time of year, or that the contract rolls over year to year. I was never told that I had the right not to join the union. Also, as of October 2021, PSEA's Website still reflects the inaccurate mailing address.

Ultimately, I left the union because it got to the point that I could not sleep at night knowing I was inadvertently supporting things I strongly disagreed with. Now that I'm out, the freedom is incredible to me. I feel like I stood my ground and stood up for what is important to me. I value my freedom of speech, and I don't want an organization to speak for me when I don't agree with what they're saying or doing.

I don't want other teachers and public employees to have to go through the barriers I had to go through. I want other people to know they have a right to get out, and to feel the same sense of freedom I feel.

This bill has the potential to help so many public employees by making sure they understand their right not to join a union, and by letting them leave the union on their own timetable and without barriers. Our First Amendment rights shouldn't be treated like a cell phone contract. We should have the right to use our voices when we choose, not when the union chooses.

Thank you for letting me share my story with you.