

WRA Policy Report
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Worker's Rights Amendment brings future coverage for past laws

Amendment 1 to the Illinois Constitution would allow collective bargaining



1910 Chicago Garment Worker's Strike, unknown author

CHICAGO – Upcoming elections will decide the fate of Amendment 1 to the Illinois Constitution, or the Worker's Rights Amendment, guaranteeing the right for workers to unionize and collectively bargain. With the increase of stories about Starbucks union leaders being fired, the amendment comes at a tumultuous time for worker's rights.

The Worker's Rights Amendment would allow workers to collectively bargain for pay raises, hours, and working conditions, as well as the right to organize into unions. The amendment would drastically impact the ability for anti-work politicians to pass right-to-work laws, or laws that would force a worker to join a union, which are known as union security clauses. Under federal law, forcing a worker to join a union is illegal due to the Taft-Hartley Act of 1946.

“The law prohibits compelling anybody to be a union member [making it] illegal to compel somebody to join,” explained Dr. Robert Bruno, a professor of Labor and Employment Relations and director of the Labor Education Program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “But [if] they choose not to join, then the union security agreement says that the worker pays a fee that covers the union's [expenses] for representing [and negotiating] for the [worker on their behalf.]”

“When money is in the hands of workers, they’re going to fund [the local economy],” said Dr. Jessica Cook-Qurayshi, the Director of the DePaul University Labor Education center, “As opposed to more money going to the CEOs and shareholders [of companies] who [are] certainly less likely to spend [their] money in our local economy.”

Critics of the referendum argue that it would put too much power in the hands of unions. “Unions should not be formulating general public policy at their headquarters,” wrote the [Editorial Board of the Chicago Tribune](#). “That’s the sacred mandate voters give to elected officials.”

The Illinois Policy Institute, a Libertarian based think tank, came out against the amendment. “All Illinoisans would be forced to pay the bill for costly contract concessions that carry more weight than state law,” [wrote Joe Tabor](#), a senior policy analyst for the institute. “Those government union powers don’t exist in any other state.”

Based on the research conducted by Dr. Bruno, there are many other states that have similar collective bargaining laws. In collective bargaining states, their economy grows 3% faster from 2010-2020 than non-collective bargaining states. In addition, the research states that Illinois’ economy has grown 2% slower than the national average.

FIGURE 6: GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT GROWTH, BY STATES THAT DO AND DO NOT SUPPORT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Economic Growth by State (2010-2020)	Gross Domestic Product in 2010	Gross Domestic Product in 2020	GDP Growth	Difference
Free Collective-Bargaining States	\$8,318,463,400,000	\$11,726,969,400,000	+41.0%	+2.6%
States that Do Not Support Collective Bargaining	\$6,569,679,500,000	\$9,090,648,100,000	+38.4%	--

Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 2010-2020 “GDP & Personal Income” data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis at the U.S. Department of Commerce ([BEA, 2021](#)).

Source: The Workers’ Rights Amendment and Its Impact on Protecting Quality Jobs and Essential Industries in Illinois, conducted by Robert Bruno, Frank Manzo, and Grace Dunn

At Starbucks, the unionization efforts are taking their toll.. More than [125 Starbucks](#) employees have been fired as a result of trying to unionize. “I feel as if [unionizing] would make [working] at least a little better if it meant that bosses and the people in charge at Starbucks Corporation

saw all of what their baristas go through,” said Chloe McCoy. “I plan on either transferring to another store as soon as possible or quitting the job altogether.”

“[Unionization] is not to be discussed in the workplace as it is not something that is being done by Starbucks Corporation itself, but rather by Starbucks employees,” Starbucks partner Chloe McCoy said. “The only time we are allowed to discuss [unionizing] is in brief answers if customers bring it up.”

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