

The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony on LD 1041

“An Act Regarding Collective Bargaining for Public Employees under the Municipal Public Employees Labor Relations Laws”

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as a policy analyst at the Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to express our opposition to LD 1041.

This bill would repeal Maine’s prohibition on strikes for tens of thousands of state and local government workers, potentially exposing the public to serious risk and granting public employees too much influence over their employers. As towns across Maine struggle to keep personnel costs in check, now is not the time to give public sector unions additional tools to impose greater burdens on taxpayers.

The law this bill seeks to strike down is half a century old, and for good reason. Since many government workers hold positions central to communities’ safety and functioning, granting these workers the right to strike would give them undue leverage to extract concessions from their employers.

A strike at a private company may affect that business’s operations, reduce its profit, and disrupt other firms in its supply chain, but the broader effects on society are likely to be minimal. A strike among public school teachers, firefighters, or policemen, on the other hand, has profound ripple effects on virtually all residents of a community.

During the massive Boston police strike of 1919, for example, the city was thrown into chaos and crime was rampant.¹ Policymakers have long recognized the threats that public employee strikes pose to the safety of communities. As a result, “only two states (Hawaii and Ohio) grant firefighters and police the right to strike, and only twelve states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Vermont) allow teachers to strike.”²

As an article in the Yale Law Review from 1970 noted:

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Boston-Police-Strike>

² <http://cepr.net/documents/state-public-cb-2014-03.pdf>

“...once public employee unions become well established, they will, if they are allowed to strike, have too much power. For the effect of the strike weapon is to put competing claimants in the political process (at all levels of government) at a disadvantage substantial enough for us to insist that it constitutes...a “distortion” of the “normal” American political process.”³

Maine’s current system for addressing demands from public labor unions, while far from perfect, is preferable to a policy under which local communities could be exposed to real harm from widespread strikes from public employees who already typically enjoy more generous compensation than their private sector counterparts.

I urge you to reject this proposal. Thank you.

³ <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bfd4/0c0f1cee919f766bb6ca541ebcdefaa53a05.pdf>