



# Right to Work—For Less

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### Right-to-Work laws inhibit the right to organize.

Right-to-Work laws do not guarantee any rights. Right-to-Work statutes prohibit employers and unions from voluntarily negotiating a union security agreement. A union security agreement requires employees who benefit from the union's representation to pay dues that cover the costs of union negotiations, contract administration, and other union-provided job services.

### Right-to-Work laws are designed to financially cripple the union movement.

Federal law requires unions to represent nonmembers. For example, if a nonunion worker is fired illegally, the union must finance the expensive legal proceedings to defend him or her. Right-to-Work laws allow workers to enjoy a union's services without paying dues. Not only does this discourage workers from joining the union, but it undermines worker solidarity.

### Right-to-Work laws decrease wages for everyone.

Because workers' organizing rights are diminished in states with Right-to-Work laws, an average worker earns about \$7,131 a year less than workers in free bargaining states (\$30,656 versus \$37,787).<sup>1</sup> Across the nation, union members earn \$9,308 a year more than nonunion members (\$41,652 versus \$32,344).<sup>2</sup> Clearly these laws only provide a right to work for less.

### Right-to-Work laws especially harm people of color.

People of color generally benefit the most from union membership. On average, Hispanic union members earn 50 percent (\$224) more each week than nonunion Hispanics, and African Americans earn 31 percent (\$156) more each week if they are union members.<sup>3</sup>

### Right-to-Work states have more poverty, higher infant mortality rates and poorer schools.

Right-to-Work states have a poverty rate of 13.5 percent, compared with 12.2 percent in free bargaining states. The infant mortality rate is 7.94 percent higher and the uninsured population rate is 15 percent higher on average in Right-to-Work states. And Right-to-Work states spend on average \$1,680 less per pupil in elementary and secondary school. The lack of spending results in lower teacher salaries and student test scores—average teacher salaries are \$6,943 lower and composite ACT scores are 3.55 percent lower in Right-to-Work states.

### Right-to-Work laws endanger workers' physical security.

A union weakened by Right-to-Work laws has less power to act as a force for safer working conditions. More workplace deaths and injuries occur in states with Right-to-Work laws. According to calculations from Bureau of Labor statistics, the rate of workplace deaths is 41 percent higher in states with Right-to-Work laws. And injured workers in those states have fewer benefits to help them recover physically and financially. In 1996, workers compensation benefits were 50 percent lower in Right-to-Work states than in free bargaining states.<sup>4</sup>

### It is in states' economic interest to keep unions strong.

Studies show that unions increase productivity by encouraging new technology, labor management coordination, and increased training. To compete, nonunion businesses often increase their use of technology and train workers in new skills, making them eligible for higher wages. As wages rise, consumers have more money to spend, and more jobs are created. The ultimate beneficiary is the overall state economy.

***This policy summary relies in large part on information from the AFL-CIO.***

## Endnotes

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates," November 2004.
2. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," 2005.
3. Ibid.
4. Kathleen O'Leary Morgan and Scott Morgan, *State Rankings 2000: A Statistical View of the 50 United States*, April 2000.

## Updates