

MONTANA AFL-CIO PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS



The statements contained herein reflect the views of the Montana AFL-CIO, a federation of labor organizations representing more than 50,000 Montana working families.

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE A UNION

The right to form a union and engage in collective bargaining is protected by the First Amendment and enshrined in U.S. and international human rights laws, but for many U.S. workers it is a right that exists only on paper. Far too often, workers who want to stand together to form unions face intense intimidation aimed at suppressing their freedoms to unionize and bargain for their wages, benefits, and workplace conditions. Workers and their families have suffered due to attacks on their freedom of speech and suppression of their rights to organize. Management should not get to dictate whether workers can unionize and should not be in a position to authorize or ignore such a decision. Workers should be allowed to form unions regardless of whether management agrees.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining ensures a group of employees are able to negotiate as a unit with their employer over safety, pay and benefits. As a collective unit, employees can be unified, stand together, and speak with one voice. This ensures that workers can be on an even playing field with their employer during negotiations, providing a greater ability to secure fair pay and benefits and safe and flexible workplace conditions. Collective bargaining also secures whistleblower protections and job flexibility, including family leave and advancement opportunities. Additionally, collective bargaining for employees in the public sector serves as an important safeguard against cronyism. Collective bargaining is essential to middle class mobility in Montana and must be protected for both private and public sector employees.

MAJORITY SIGN-UP

Workers should always have the right to organize a union in a fair process, free of intimidation. That is why the Montana AFL-CIO supports majority sign-up (also referred to as “card check”), a fixture of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act which allows employees to sign authorization forms or “cards” that indicate their desire to be represented by a union. If a majority of employees indicate they want union representation, the employer is required to recognize that union. Studies show that workers who use majority sign-up experience less coercion when they are forced to engage in an election process that is a step beyond card check.. Workers should have the right to form a union through majority sign-up and free of intimidation or coercion.

RIGHT-TO-WORK IS WRONG FOR MONTANA

Right-to-Work laws infringe on the freedom of workers to unionize and collectively bargain, driving down wages for all workers, including workers that aren't part of a union. Workers in Right-to-Work states earn less, are less likely to have health insurance, and more likely to die or be hurt on the job. Despite what proponents claim, Right-to-Work laws are not a deciding factor in where businesses locate, and high-tech companies that provide good-paying jobs favor states where workers can more freely organize. In fact, studies show that Right-to-Work laws actually lead to a decrease in employment. The MT AFL-CIO continues to stand strongly opposed to all efforts to pass Right-to-Work laws, in whatever form they may take.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Like many areas of the country, Montana struggles with outdated infrastructure that is in varying stages of disrepair. This includes old school buildings in need of repair, roadways that are in critical condition, and water and sewer systems in need of updates. The failure to invest in our state's infrastructure has impeded transportation safety and Montana's economy. The Montana State AFL-CIO supports public investment in infrastructure that creates good paying jobs, maintains public safety, improves our schools, and supports economic growth in our state.

TRADITIONAL ENERGY

The Montana AFL-CIO supports maximizing existing technologies to increase efficiencies and reduce carbon emissions from existing power plants, strategies that will clean up the environment and provide employment opportunities for tens of thousands of Montanans. Coal is a necessary part of our energy portfolio and will be for many decades. Montana has more recoverable coal reserves than any other state in the country. At our current rate of production, it would take more than 1,600 years to exhaust Montana's coal reserves. Montana families are highly reliant on coal to heat their home, with coal providing about half of Montana's energy. Furthermore, the responsible mining, transporting, and production of energy from coal provide labor intensive, highly-skilled jobs, many of which are union, that sustain over ten thousand Montana families.

RENEWABLE ENERGY & SUSTAINABLE JOBS

The Montana AFL-CIO supports the development of renewable energy. We support protecting the democratic, transparent, and accountable regulatory framework that secures our future by protecting consumers and encouraging energy conservation. We support the training of our workforce to operate and maintain the utilities of the future. Renewable energy expands the energy industry and increases the potential for high-paying, family sustaining jobs.

DAVIS-BACON ACT

The Montana AFL-CIO supports the Davis-Bacon Act and the Little Davis-Bacon Act, which requires the payment of prevailing community wages on federally and state financed construction projects. The law ensures local contractors that uphold prevailing rates of pay and local labor standards in a geographic area a fair chance to compete for government projects without being undercut by outside firms who are seeking to increase their profits by paying cheap wages. The act also protects the government from unreliable operators seeking to win federal contracts by bidding too low to attract competent craftsmen.

VOTER ACCESS

The Montana AFL-CIO believes that every Montanan should be able to vote regardless of class, income, age, and race. However, voter access is under attack in Montana. The Montana Legislature recently passed bills that invalidate certain forms of Voter ID and eliminated same day registration. Their goals are clear: diminish voter turnout and exclude the young, the poor, workers, and people of color from the voting process. The Montana AFL-CIO knows that our democracy only works when every eligible voter is able to make their voice heard, and supports policies that will make voting easier, not more difficult.

EDUCATION

The Montana AFL-CIO supports robust investments in public education, at all grade levels, that will provide all Montana children and families with access to quality and equitable educational opportunities. This includes funding for public early childhood programs that prepare young children for future learning. Support for public education must also extend to post-secondary education, which creates economic development and advances the quality of life for Montanans. All Montanans must have affordable access to quality post-secondary education, including ensuring that student tuition is affordable. At all grade levels, educators must have the support and resources they need, and receive a competitive salary and benefits for their work. School facilities must have proper equipment and building maintenance.

The MT AFL-CIO opposes any efforts to privatize public education. Private school vouchers, K-12 education savings accounts and other schemes, such as education tax credits for K-12 private school expenses, undermine public education by taking scarce public funds away from public schools, which are open to all students, and shifting them to private schools that are not obligated to provide all students with an equitable education.

PAY EQUITY

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 made it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to male and female employees who perform work requiring equal effort, skill and responsibility. Yet today, wage disparities between women and men are evident in both the private and public sectors. In Montana, working women make about 75% of what their male colleagues make in wages, regardless of their experience and education. It's time to protect equal pay for equal work by passing legislation that ensures wage transparency. It's also important to note that the gender wage gap is smaller for union women than their non-union sisters, so continuing to push for measures that allow workers to freely join unions will directly address the gender wage gap.

TIP CREDIT

Montana law states that tips are the property of the worker. By definition, employers owe wages to their workers for the hours they have worked. Tips are not provided by the employer and should not be considered a credit toward the employer's responsibility to pay wages. Tip Credit allows employers to count the gratuities of tipped employees and apply them as "credit" toward the employee's wages. In effect, this takes away the gratuities given to workers and transfers the income illegally to the benefit of the employer. In Montana, too many workers are illegally required to submit their tips to the employer, and as a result are earning below the minimum wage. The MT AFL-CIO feels strongly that such practices are wage theft.

PROTECTED LABOR AGREEMENTS

Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) have been used in the construction industry since the 1930's. A PLA is a single-site craft labor agreement that is used to provide reliable, cost-effective project staffing for public and private capital construction projects. PLAs have the power to ensure a Montana preference in hiring so that projects funded by Montana taxpayers are employing Montana workers, who will further stimulate our economy by spending their paychecks in our communities and paying their income tax to our state's general fund. The Montana AFL-CIO supports PLAs, and will continue to advocate that the Montana Legislature removes its ban on these agreements.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Montana's public employee retirement system covers tens of thousands of Montana workers and retirees. It includes the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS), Teachers Retirement System (TRS), the Firefighters' Unified Retirement

Systems (FURS), and the Game Wardens' and Peace Officers' Retirement Systems (GWPORS), The integrity of these plans must be protected. We oppose all efforts to convert defined benefit plans into any form of hybrid or defined contribution plan.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Healthcare is a basic human right and Medicaid is one of the cornerstones of America's healthcare system. It was created to provide essential services to Americans who had no other means of affording the healthcare they needed, including older Americans, people with disabilities, and low-income children. The Montana AFL-CIO supported the expansion of Medicaid in Montana (the HELP Act), which provided healthcare to an additional 70,000 Montanans, and the reauthorization of that program during the 2019 Legislative Session. We will continue to stand opposed to any efforts to weaken or repeal Montana's Medicaid expansion program.

NON-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE (NDO)

The Labor Movement has always been at the forefront of defending and expanding civil rights in this country. Today, many working Montanans are discriminated against in the workplace and in the housing market due to their sexual orientation and gender identities. As trade unionists, we are obligated to stand against unfair treatment of workers and their families. The LGBTQ community and labor community stand together and support the passage of Non-Discrimination Ordinances (NDOs) that guarantee liberty and dignity to every citizen regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

