

SB22-230 Collective Bargaining For Counties

Thursday, May 5 2022

House State, Civic, Military, & Veterans Affairs- Upon Adjournment | LSB A

Testimony: Oppose

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and fellow committee members.

My name is Adam Burg, and I'm the vice president of government affairs for the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce. I am here today to express our organization's opposition to SB22-230.

Coloradans have always preserved a careful balance between labor unions and employers. In the private sector, the Labor Peace Act is a fundamental component of Colorado labor relations. But this balance is potentially at risk at the state Capitol right now – something of great concern to our organization and our members.

Today local communities can decide whether their government employees can form labor unions, and whether those unions can then collectively bargain. This is good for local control, but not so much for unions looking for more dues in the only sector where they're growing: government.

Whether you believe collective bargaining has a place in the public sector or not, Colorado has a long history of local control on this matter. Currently, local governments are not required to recognize unions and collectively bargain unless they or local voters specifically allow it.

Colorado Public Radio recently reported that just 16 out of 270 local governments have made that choice. The legislature should not unilaterally overrule the other local governments who have not made that choice.

In the private sector, competition enables consumers to have choices – and markets (including for labor) keep things balanced and competitive. Residents do not have similar choices when it comes to law enforcement, fire protection, water, or human services caseworkers, for example. This lack of competition gives government unions enormous leverage at the negotiating table and Colorado taxpayers would be forced to pay because they have nowhere else to turn for essential services.

Another issue of concern is strikes. While the sponsors have argued that this language is reflective of the Colorado WINS agreement – we strongly feel that if the intent of this legislation is to prohibit public sector strikes, as suggested by the sponsors, it should be more explicit and reflected in the language used in the bill.

Lastly, I want to preface all my testimony by highlighting that I was a county employee for over 4 years prior to my current role with the Chamber of Commerce. I was a direct report to the county manager and spearheaded government affairs for one of the largest counties in Colorado.

I am extremely familiar with county government operations, and this bill fails to understand that county functions are overseen by independent elected officials beyond just county commissioners - for example sheriffs, clerk and recorders, and treasurers. This bill assumes all county staff operate under the same employment structures – which clearly shows a lack of familiarity with county functions and a major oversight of this legislation that raises serious red flags.

The reality is we have unique and diverse counties across our state. And not only do our counties differ in the makeup of their constituencies, but also in their structure and functions depending on their size and capacity. The decision as to whether public employees can unionize should be a local one. That's the Colorado way. It's why we have fought to maintain a unique balance in Colorado that shouldn't be upended by organized labor interests. We encourage a no vote on this legislation.