



Collective Bargaining Law **Labor Basics**

Collective Bargaining for Public Employees

What is Public Employee Collective Bargaining? Although collective bargaining for private sector workers was adopted into Federal Law in 1935, it was nearly 50 years later when public employees in Ohio obtained the right to negotiate workplace contracts. On July 6, 1983 Governor Richard Celeste signed the collective bargaining bill (SB133) into law, which went into effect on April 1, 1984 and is contained in Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 4117.

As a result of the collective bargaining law, six hundred thousand public employees including teachers, firefighters, police officers, state and local service workers, could not only form and join a union, but also enjoy legal rights in negotiating workplace contracts with the public employer. The collective bargaining law also ushered in the State Employees Relations Board, principally charged with administering Chapter 4117 and resolving labor and management disputes through a three-member board appointed by the Governor.

How Does Public Employee Collective Bargaining Benefit Ohio? Twenty-five years after the bill was put into law, the benefits associated with collective bargaining in the public sector are clear. Typical with unionized workers versus non-unionized workers, the gains in public employee pay, health care and retirement benefits, and working conditions have improved dramatically.

Collective bargaining not only benefited workers, but it created greater consistency and stability in the relationship between labor and management. This shared approach to public work has led to better planning, greater productivity and excellent delivery of services. Workers and employers mutually invested in outcomes create reliability and accountability to taxpayers and the community at large.

In addition, the procedures in place to resolve conflicts and disputes have proven effective. Prior to collective bargaining, workers had no vehicle for dispute resolution, so work stoppages were frequent in the public sector; in fact Ohio had the 3rd highest public employee strike rate in the country. Dispute resolution now includes mediation, fact finding, and stiffer penalties for illegal strikes for some portions of the public sector. Police and Fire safety forces are no longer allowed to strike, but if dispute agreement is not reached it is resolved through binding arbitration.

Now, one of the greatest challenges facing the public sector is the threat of privatization. Often driven by shortsighted attempts to save money or a desire to break a union, contracting out of public services frequently costs more to taxpayers with less oversight and inferior delivery of services. Whether it is outsourcing corrections, educational services, solid waste collection, or social services, the same pattern of higher costs, less accountability, and increasing chance of corruption surface. The main objective of private companies to maximize profits fundamentally conflicts with the public responsibility to taxpayers for quality, dependability and safety.