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May 16, 2017

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I urge you to oppose the Employees and Taxpayers Protection Act of 2017 (H.R. 1461), which would unfairly limit federal workers use of official time, double probationary periods from 12 months to 24 months and allow union members to revoke union membership at any time. H.R. 1461 is expected to be marked up in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and AFSCME urges you to oppose this harmful, unfair anti-worker legislation.

We oppose H.R. 1461 because its limits on the use of official time would make the federal government less effective, less efficient, and less responsive. Official time has proven its value because it encourages labor-management discussion on workplace matters and allows union representation for improving workplace safety and working conditions, protecting workers from discrimination, and developing new employee training. H.R. 1461 would reduce labor-management discussions and problem solving, dampen consensus, and undermine workplace community building. H.R. 1461's restrictions on official time would move the federal workplace in the wrong direction and ignore similar positive innovations in the private sector. It would erode workplace representation by workers who volunteer to represent members of collective bargaining units in federal agencies and thus reduce morale and effective leadership.

H.R. 1461's complete prohibition on the use of official time by physicians, dentists, optometrists, podiatrists, and chiropractors would undermine union democracy by effectively banning selected – and in this case well-educated – employees from serving as union officials in the workplace. It also would prevent dentists from representing dentists, stop physicians from representing physicians, and prevent similarly situated workers from representing each other. Furthermore, H.R. 1461 imposes different caps (at 0%, 25% or 50%) on the amount of official time that employees in differing occupations can use, and imposes additional barriers for some workers to engage in workplace democracy.

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

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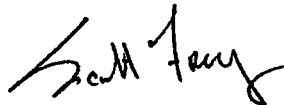
Official time is a long established policy under federal labor-management relations law. It has existed since the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was enacted. Official time allows federal employees represented by unions to use dedicated time during work hours for needed activities in the joint interest of a federal agency and workers. Using official time for internal union work or politics is already expressly prohibited. Official time is used for handling employee grievances, negotiating collective bargaining agreements, or trainings. Moreover, official time is approved by the affected agency and must be "reasonable, necessary, and in the public interest."

AFSCME strongly opposes lengthening probationary periods from 12 months to 18 months and the provision in Reps. Banks substitute amendment to H.R. 1461, which doubles the probationary period to 24 months. There is no justification to for a probationary period of two years.

AFSCME strongly opposes the provision in H.R. 1461, which would allow union members to revoke their union membership at any time. This would create a free rider and collective action problem for all other employees. It would allow an employee to take advantage of their individual circumstances in the context of the general workplace calendar and various financial incentives and personnel policies to time joining and dropping their union membership. Federal employees are already free to join or not join a union in their workplace. This provision is aimed at undermining workplace cohesion and should be rejected

AFSCME urges you oppose H.R. 1461.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Frey". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Scott Frey,
Director of Federal Government Affairs

SF:MG:rf