

Attorney General Raoul Calls On Senate To Pass The Pro Act And Stand Up For Working Americans

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CHICAGO – Attorney General Kwame Raoul, as part of a coalition of 17 attorneys general, today called on the U.S. Senate to pass the Protecting the Right to Organize Act

of 2021 (PRO Act). The PRO Act strengthens and modernizes the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which enshrines workers' fundamental rights to organize, unionize and bargain collectively.

In the face of globalization, rapid technological change, rising income inequality, race and gender wage gaps, and a pandemic-fueled recession, the PRO Act honors this country's long-standing commitment to treating workers fairly and respecting the dignity of work. [In today's letter](#), Raoul and the coalition highlight the urgent need to pass the PRO Act and urge the Senate to seize this historic opportunity to improve the lives of America's working families.

"Now more than ever, American workers deserve the right to collectively bargain for higher wages, stronger benefits and safer workplaces," Raoul said. "I encourage Congress to pass the PRO Act to protect the rights of workers to form unions and advocate for safe working conditions and benefits for themselves and their families."

When the NLRA was enacted in 1935, it was broadly intended to promote workers' rights to unionize and bargain collectively for better wages and working conditions. Between the late 1940s and the 1970s, union membership skyrocketed, and the median household income rose in lockstep with increased productivity – both growing more than 100%. In the face of a rapidly changing marketplace, employers have found ways to evade the purpose of the NLRA over time. Today, just 12% of American workers are represented by a union – down from 27% in 1979. This decline in union membership has contributed significantly to a historic rise in income inequality. Despite climbing labor productivity, median earnings have barely increased over the past four decades.

The PRO Act is composed of commonsense reforms to the NLRA designed to curb abusive practices that employers use to prevent workers from unionizing and to restore the law's original purpose of encouraging unionization and worker protections. For example, the act would override "right-to-work" laws and allow employers and unions to agree on "fair share" fees from non-members covered under a collective bargaining agreement. Fair share fees would cover the cost of collective bargaining and administering the agreement.

The PRO Act also would give workers more freedom to organize without employer interference. For example, it would prohibit employers from requiring workers to attend anti-union meetings and would allow workers to cast votes in union elections away from their employer's premises. The act would also clarify the definition of an employee, preventing employers from misclassifying workers as independent contractors to deprive them of their rights. Moreover, employers would be required to pay civil penalties for violations of the NLRA and compensatory damages for workers, regardless of immigration status.

Protecting workers' rights to organize and collectively bargain is a key component to empowering workers against exploitative employers and reducing economic inequality. Compared to their non-union counterparts, union members earn 10% to 15% higher wages, experience less wage theft, are less reliant on public benefits, and are more likely to have employer-sponsored benefits like health insurance, paid sick days, and pensions. Similarly, the PRO Act would provide critical protections for workers of color. Workers of color have suffered the worst effects of rising income inequality in recent decades and a disproportionate burden from the pandemic-driven recession. For example, Black and Latina women have lost jobs at a rate three times higher than that of white men during the pandemic.

Raoul and the coalition urge the Senate to pass the PRO Act, which will help restore the ability of the nation's workers to organize and bargain collectively for better pay and improved working conditions.

Joining Raoul in sending the letter are the attorneys general of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

Attorney General Raoul encourages workers who have experienced workplace discrimination to contact his office's Workplace Rights Hotline at 1-844-740-5076 or by visiting the [Attorney General's website](#).