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Florida AFL-CIO

Press Release

The Florida AFL-CIO Supports the "Individual Personal Private Property Protection Act of 2007"

The state labor federation's support of the misnamed "Gun Bill" is not about guns, but about protecting the rights of workers and consumers

Tallahassee - On Tuesday March 27th, the Florida AFL-CIO publicly stated its support for SB 2356 in a meeting of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. The Florida AFL-CIO is a state federation of over 450 local unions representing 500,000 teachers, construction workers, public employees, retail workers, service professionals and health care professionals. The legislation, misnamed and mischaracterized by the state's most powerful business groups as the "guns at work" bill is really about ensuring that legal, private property of workers and consumers is protected in their vehicles when they go to work or shop at commercial businesses licensed to be open to the public.

Over the past four years, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Florida Retail Federation and other special interest groups representing Florida's largest and most powerful businesses have been working to create unprecedented new rights for the owners of these businesses. These new rights would give the owners of these businesses broad new powers to ban a wide range of activities previously protected by the United States Constitution.

From "tort reform" legislation that absolve businesses from any liability for accidents when they do not maintain basic safety conditions, to bills that prohibit citizen groups from gathering signatures for petition campaigns or registering people to vote, these powerful business groups are seeking to carve out artificial islands of territory where the constitutional rights of individuals are null and void.

In committee testimony, Florida AFL-CIO Communications Director Rich Templin said, "We are not here to talk about the 2nd Amendment; we are here to talk about the 1st Amendment, the 4th Amendment, the 14th Amendment and the Bill of Rights. The Chamber and Retail federation have a plethora of bills peppered through the legislative process that put the rights of dirt, the property, over the people who make that dirt profitable – the workers, the consumers and the people as whole who license those businesses through the state. This legislation is a pro-active step to ensure that the privacy rights of workers are protected. It is an unfortunate reality that in the current era, we need this protection for people who have legal materials in their cars whether those be union organizing materials, political information or secured firearms."

There is disturbing anecdotal evidence coming in from around the country that union members are being harassed and/or fired because they have been found to have union or political materials in their cars which their employers find objectionable. This legislation simply codifies in state law the long-standing principle that a worker's vehicle is his/her private property and does not fall under the purview of their employer. If a worker or consumer is believed to have illegal materials in their vehicle, there are numerous legal avenues that the employer can pursue.

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Florida AFL-CIO President Cindy Hall said in a statement following the committee meeting, “There is a real pattern forming here. These powerful businesses are working in piece-meal fashion to get the legal right to be the state’s new speech police. They own the new town squares and want to ensure that they can control the civil discourse in those areas. Workers and consumers should not be forced to give up their rights to work or buy life’s necessities. They should be able to peacefully and respectfully talk about issues, gather signatures on petitions and help register voters. Business owners should not be able to pick and choose who can do that. Their opposition to this bill proves that they even want to control what is in your car.”

The Florida AFL-CIO has tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with the Florida Chamber of Commerce and others to develop uniform standards and practices that protects business owners from undue disruption of their businesses but also .protects people’s rights. So far, they have largely ignored these efforts. The labor federation’s support of SB 2356 is an attempt to maintain a balance between the rights of property and the rights of people.

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