

News from the National League of Cities

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Contact:
Sherry Conway Appel, 202-626-3003

City Officials Urge the Senate to Vote “NO” on Mandatory Collective Bargaining Bill

Washington, DC – The National League of Cities (NLC) today urged the Senate to vote “no” on H.R.980/S. 2123, the “Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act of 2007,” saying it would mandate collective bargaining between local governments and public safety officials while trampling on the protections of the 10th Amendment of the Constitution.

“Our opposition to H.R. 980/S. 2123 has nothing to do with our support for or against collective bargaining,” said Donald J. Borut, NLC executive director. “Instead, we are against this unprecedented expansion of federal government power into the labor relations decisions of states, cities and towns when they bargain with their public safety workforces.

“Thirty-five states decided through the legislative and electoral process that collective bargaining was right for their state, county, city and town workers. Fifteen other states decided that collective bargaining was not the way to go for them. Unfortunately, this new federal mandate could trample on these decisions.

“This bill has come before the Senate without a single hearing in which these issues could be addressed. Yet it raises constitutional questions about the rights of states and cities; could affect the ability of cities and towns to respond to emergencies; and would have serious financial impacts on our cities and towns already feeling the pressure from the current economic downturn. Nothing in this bill would improve public safety or security; in fact, it could have the opposite effect of forcing cities and towns to reduce their workforce or equipment levels.

“We strongly urge the Congress to rethink its views on this bill and we concur with the President that, if enacted, this bill should be vetoed as it is currently written.

“No city or town with a population of more than 5,000 would be safe from this federal incursion into its power. Even municipalities which currently allow collective bargaining would be impacted. For example, New York has one of the strongest labor laws in the country, effectively protecting workers, governments and the public. This bill could force the state to water down its provisions to meet the new federal requirement. In another example, Florida currently has a provision in its collective bargaining law that provides for non-judicial solutions to resolving labor disputes. The Senate bill would require that the courts step in and address labor disputes, and as a result, Florida would have to change its statutes.

“States like Virginia and North Carolina that do not permit state and local government workers to collectively bargain with their employers, would be forced to do so within two years of enactment while following rules and procedures dictated by Washington.

“There is some irony in this approach by Congress. The U.S. Capitol Police who work for our senators and representatives do not have the same collective bargaining rights that this bill would provide to our own public safety officers. Although the Capitol Police are allowed to form and join a union, they are not permitted to negotiate their wages, hours or conditions of employment.”

For more information, contact Sherry Conway Appel, 202-626-3003.

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