

# The Truth about Right to Work for Less

## *Comparison of Pennsylvania and “Right to Work” States Shows that So-Called “Right to Work” Law is Wrong for Working Families*

Anti-worker and business-backed groups are pushing to pass such a so-called “Right to Work” law here in Pennsylvania. Supporters claim that Right to Work laws have created greater economic prosperity, but on many different indicators, conditions for working families are better in Pennsylvania than in Right to Work states. Contrary to the rhetoric from Right to Work supporters, Pennsylvania will not be better off becoming a Right to Work state.



### Wages

- Median weekly wages in 20 of the 22 Right to Work states are lower than median weekly wages in Pennsylvania. Median weekly wages in Pennsylvania in 2009 were \$740, \$60 per week more than the average for Right to Work states, and nearly \$150 a week more than the median weekly earnings in Right to Work states like Arkansas (\$596) and Mississippi (\$595).
- On average, annual pay is also lower in Right to Work states than in Pennsylvania; in 2009, the average annual pay in Right to Work States was \$39,169, \$5,660 less than in Pennsylvania, where the average annual pay was \$44,829 in 2009. Average annual pay is greater in Pennsylvania than in 20 of the 22 Right to Work states, and is more than \$10,000 greater than the average annual pay in Right to Work states like South Dakota (\$33,352) and Mississippi (\$33,847).
- Median income in Pennsylvania is 14 percent higher than the average median income for Right to Work states, and is higher than the median income in 15 of the 22 Right to Work states.
- On average, 28.3 percent of jobs in Right to Work states are in occupations that pay poverty wages, compared with 22.1 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania.



### Poverty

- Overall poverty and child poverty rates are significantly higher in Right to Work states than in Pennsylvania, with Right to Work state residents and children having a 31.7 percent and 39.1 percent greater chance of being poor, respectively. In 2009, the Pennsylvania overall and child poverty rates were 14.5 percent and 18.7 percent, respectively, compared with a 19.1 percent overall poverty rate and a 26 percent child poverty rate for Right to Work states.

- The difference between Pennsylvania and Right to Work states becomes even more evident when you look at the poverty rates for Right to Work states like Arizona (overall poverty rate of 25.8 percent and child poverty rate of 38 percent) and Mississippi (overall poverty rate of 28.9 percent and child poverty rate of 39.8 percent).



## Safety and Health

- Right to Work state residents are also 34.8 percent more likely to be killed on the job than Pennsylvania residents. The fatal occupational injury rate in Pennsylvania in 2008 was 4 percent, compared with an average of 5.4 percent in Right to Work states.
- When workers do get hurt on the job in Right to Work states, the average maximum weekly benefit is \$158 (21.2 percent) less in Right to Work states than in Pennsylvania. In Right to Work states, the average maximum benefit is only \$587 per week, compared with Pennsylvania, where the maximum weekly benefit is \$745.



## Unemployment

- Maximum weekly unemployment benefits are also higher in Pennsylvania than in Right to Work states. Unemployed Pennsylvania workers receive a weekly maximum benefit of \$572 compared with only an average maximum benefit of \$363 per week in Right to Work states.



## Health Care

- On average, residents of Right to Work states were 46.3 percent more likely to be uninsured in 2009 than Pennsylvania residents. 11.4 percent of Pennsylvanians were uninsured in 2009, compared with an average of 16.7 percent of Right to Work state residents. The difference is even more dramatic when you look at specific Right to Work states like Florida (22.4 percent uninsured), Georgia (20.5 percent uninsured), Nevada (20.8 percent uninsured) and Texas (26.1 percent uninsured).

- Children in Right to Work states are 52.4 percent more likely to be uninsured than children in Pennsylvania. 10.4 percent of children are uninsured in Right to Work states, versus 6.8 percent in Pennsylvania.
- Pennsylvania residents are also 12.3 percent more likely to have employment-based health insurance than residents of Right to Work states. 61.8 percent of Pennsylvania residents have employment-based health insurance, compared with 55.9 percent in Right to Work states.
- Pennsylvania employers are also much more likely to offer health insurance to their workers than employers in Right to Work states. In Pennsylvania, 63 percent of all employers offer health insurance to their workers, compared with 50.3 percent of employers in Right to Work states. The difference is even more dramatic for small firms employing less than 50 workers; 49.4 percent of small employers in Pennsylvania offer their employees health insurance, compared with an average of 34.6 percent of small employers in Right to Work states.



## Pensions

- Residents of Right to Work states are 15.3 percent less likely than Pennsylvania residents to have pension coverage. 43 percent of private sector workers have employer provided pension coverage in Right to Work states, versus 50.8 percent in Pennsylvania.\*



## Education

- Right to Work states spend less on educating their students than Pennsylvania. During the 2008-09 school year, Right to Work states spent only \$9,005 per student, compared with \$12,032 spent by Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania invests more per student on education than 21 of the 22 Right to Work states.
- Students in Pennsylvania are more likely than students in Right to Work states to be at grade level in math and reading. In Pennsylvania, 38.3 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were proficient in math in 2007 (compared with 29.6 percent of students in Right to Work states), and 36.4 percent were proficient in reading (compared with 28.1 percent in Right to Work states).

**Sources:**

Corporation for Enterprise Development; Economic Policy Institute; US House Committee on Ways and Means; US Census Bureau; US Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; US Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration.

\*Pension coverage is for workers aged 18-64 who worked at least 20 hours per week and 26 weeks per year. The time period covered is a 2006-2008 three-year moving average.