

December 12, 2023

The Honorable Bob Good  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515



The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Expressing Opposition to Employee Rights Act, H.R. 2700; the Modern Worker Empowerment Act, H.R. 5513 and the Save Local Business Act, H.R. 2826

Dear Chairman Good and Ranking Member DeSaulnier:

On behalf of the Child Labor Coalition (CLC), I write to express opposition to Employee Rights Act, H.R. 2700; the Modern Worker Empowerment Act, H.R. 5513 and the Save Local Business Act, H.R. 2826.

The Child Labor Coalition (CLC) represents millions of Americans through 37 organizations—worker rights, human rights, and child rights groups concerned about the welfare of vulnerable children at risk of child labor exploitation. Our members include the nation’s largest union, the National Education Association, National Consumers League, Human Rights Watch, World Vision, GreenAmerica, the United Methodist Church, Board of Church and Society, and numerous groups that do substantive work to reduce child labor in the U.S. and abroad as well as several groups that work to protect migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the U.S. We work collectively to end child exploitation and ensure bright future for children globally and in the U.S.

We are deeply concerned about the three labor-related bills under consideration in this week’s hearing. We fear that the bills will narrow the range of employees and employers covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Fewer workers will have access to minimum wage, overtime, and collective bargaining protections provided by the laws; fewer employers will be responsible for complying with these laws. The erosion of worker wages will help push workers into greater poverty and increase child labor rates.

In 2022 and 2023, we have seen an alarming expansion of child labor into U.S. factories that produce auto parts and into meatpacking facilities that produce meat and poultry. Children as young as thirteen toiled in the “graveyard” shift in meatpacking facilities before going to school sleepless and exhausted. The child workers used caustic chemicals that caused severe burns.

The number of child labor violations has increased nearly 300% since 2015, according to the Economic Policy Institute. This summer three 16-year-olds died while performing hazardous work, including one in a chicken processing plant in Mississippi and another in a sawmill in Wisconsin; a third 16-year-old died while working in a Missouri landfill. This year, *NY Times* reporter Hannah Dreier produced three alarming child labor exposés. She found over a hundred children performing hazardous work in numerous industries. In her September 20<sup>th</sup> exposé, Dreier detailed the catastrophic impact of hazardous work on one 14-year-old boy, working illegally in a poultry plant, whose arm was so badly mangled, it hangs lifeless and unusable. The boy has endured multiple surgeries and great pain.

The FLSA successfully removed millions of children from hazardous jobs in the 1930s. Prior to its enactment, children routinely worked 10- to 12-hour days in coal mines and factories. The three federal bills under consideration would join a dozen bills at the state level seeking to weaken current child labor protections. We must do all we can to ensure that the largest possible number of workers receive current FLSA, NLRA, and current state and federal child labor protections.

If enacted, the three bills would help companies that benefit from illegal child labor evade responsibility for that labor exploitation occurring in their facilities. The bills would make it extremely difficult for federal and state investigators to investigate the hiring of illegal child labor by employment staffing agencies like PSSI, the janitorial company which employed 102 children illegally in thirteen meat-processing plants in eight states. Responsibility for illegal child labor must not be deflected by companies that benefit from it; giant corporations cannot be allowed to hide behind staffing firms—this is the intention of bills like the Modern Worker Empowerment Act and the Save Local Business Act.

In 2022 and 2023, corporations such as meatpacking giant JBS and Hyundai have learned that the use of staffing firms to hire workers for their U.S. facilities poses great reputation risk when those staffing firms fail to follow due diligence hiring procurers and hire children for work that only adults are permitted to do. The meatpacking scandal resulted in a media frenzy that produced hundreds of reputation-damaging articles. In response, in May 2023, JBS announced it would create its own sanitation company to clean its facilities and said it would hire unionized workers through the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (see Michigan Farm News, May 4, 2023). Where unions exist, child labor rarely exists.

We urge you to oppose the Employee Rights Act, H.R. 2700; the Modern Worker Empowerment Act, H.R. 5513; and the Save Local Business Act, H.R. 2826, and any other attempt to narrow the scope of protections.

A list of Child Labor Coalition members follows below.

Sincerely,

*Reid Maki*

Reid Maki  
Coordinator, Child Labor Coalition  
Director of Child Labor Advocacy, the National Consumers League

CLC Members:

**ACE—Action Against Child Exploitation**  
**Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs**  
**Bank Information Center**  
**Beyond Borders**  
**Corporate Accountability Lab**  
**East Coast Migrant Head Start Project**  
**ECPAT-USA**  
**Fairtrade America**  
**Farmworker Justice**  
**First Focus Campaign for Children**  
**Free the Slaves**  
**Global Campaign for Education—US**  
**Global Fairness Initiative**  
**Global Labor Justice — International Labor Rights Forum**  
**GoodWeave**  
**Green America**  
**Human Rights Watch**  
**International Initiative to End Child Labor**

**International Rights Advocates**  
**Lawyers for Good Government**  
**Media Voices for Children**  
**Mighty Earth**  
**Migrant Legal Action Program**  
**National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education**  
**National Consumers League**  
**National Education Association**  
**National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association**  
**Pact**  
**Prime International – A Social Enterprise**  
**Sisters of the Good Shepherd National Advocacy Center**  
**Solidarity Center, AFL-CIO**  
**United Methodist Church, Board of Church and Society**  
**UNICEF USA**  
**Verité**  
**Walden Asset Management**  
**Winrock International**  
**World Vision**

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