



January 19, 2021

House Business and Labor Committee:

My name is Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN. I am a Registered Nurse and the CEO of the Montana Nurses Association (MNA). MNA is the recognized leader and advocate for the professional nurse in Montana. MNA promotes professional nursing practice, standards, and education; represents professional nurses; and provides nursing leadership in promoting high quality healthcare and overall public health.

MNA Opposes Representative Mercer’s House Bill 168 for the following:

Although Representative Mercer’s HB 168 focuses on public employees and Labor Organizations, it is an attack on all professional nurses’ ability to organize and advocate for their fellow nurses and their patients. The bill is bad for collective bargaining and MNA as a professional nurses’ union and association. This bill is a direct attack on Mary Munger’s, RN, “Blue Eyed Nurses” Bill from 1967 that, for over 50 years, has given professional nurses in Montana the right to collectively bargain.

What this HB 168 takes away from the professional nurse:

1) Agreement to Relinquish First Amendment Rights

HB 168, on line 28-29, contains items of concern. Representative Mercer is asking for “*must consent to the waiver of the public employee’s first amendment rights in associating with a labor organization*”. No one should **EVER** have to waive any of their constitutional rights. Why does Representative Mercer or any member of the Montana Legislature care that professional nurses want to associate for a collective voice.

2) End to Paycheck Deduction

Historically, unions ensured that workers have safe working conditions, livable pay and benefits. Union dues are an essential expense for workers in their pursuit of fair wages, job security, and safe policies.

Why does the Montana Legislature or Representative Mercer care where professional nurses spend their money? Telling nurses **how** to spend their money? This will eliminate nurses’ ability to have union dues deducted from their paycheck, after-tax. His goal is to make it harder to be a member of their professional nurses’ union and an attempt to weaken the professional nurse collective voice. Why?



3) End to Exclusive Representation

Unions have helped ensure that workers have decent pay and benefits as well as a voice and workplace advocacy. Exclusive representation is another advocacy tool that allows MNA to be the collective voice for nurses across Montana. MNA represents many nurse members across Montana to advocate for safe working conditions, professional development, professional excellence, and quality patient care.

This advocacy aligns with economic interests of workers. Unions motivate and support workers to be involved in actions that positively impact them and their families. Why does Representative Mercer or the Montana Legislature want to weaken the professional nurses' voice? Employers often have the upper hand. Alone, a nurse would be a single voice with little impact. Together, professional nurses have been the check and balance to employer overreach and power.

4) Individual Recertification

Another attack on professional nurses' ability to organize and collectively bargain. This means that each year, before the nurses contracts expire, they will have to hold another union representation election before nurses can then again, bargain on their behalf. This will SIGNIFICANTLY impact professional nurses' ability to advocate and bargain as it will take focus away from important workplace conditions that they want to address to improve their working conditions and provide safe quality patient care. The goal with this is to take away the nurses collective voice and advocacy from things like wages, benefits, and working conditions, all the while forcing the nurses to hold an election every other year. This recertification chase adds unnecessary costs and takes away productive time that labor and management can have to collaboratively and professionally address nurse issues that ultimately impact safe quality patient care.

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