

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers



Local Union 304

Chartered

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Before the Committee on Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Written Testimony of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 304. In Opposition to HB 2354

Chairman Tarwater, Vice Chair Long, and Honorable Members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 2354. IBEW Local 304 was chartered in 1933. We are the largest IBEW Local in the state of Kansas, representing over 2400 workers across 23 different contracts. We represent workers from Westar, Kansas Gas Service, and Peraton, to name a few. Currently, Kansas is a “right to work” state, meaning that anyone can work under a collective bargaining agreement without being a member of the union. Despite this, we maintain an almost unheard of 80 % union density across our contracts, proving that workers still see the value of having a voice and a vote in their working conditions.

Our concern with HB 2354 is the possibility that it could develop into an administratively difficult situation for the unions involved in the public sector. While most of Local 304’s contracts are private sector, we do represent the public workers of the City of Chanute. There are 85 workers covered by a union contract there, approximately 70% of them have chosen to be union members and pay dues. We have long maintained a minimum time agreement on dues deduction and believe that is fair for the following reasons. If a worker can join and leave the union at will, it puts an administrative strain on the union office and the employer to coordinate the starting or stopping of dues. Also, it prevents the workers from jumping into the union when the contract opens only to jump out after the ratification vote. We have seen this in the past and all that serves to do is skew the vote, which puts the hard work of the negotiation process at risk, exposing both labor and management to extra cost and loss of time and productivity. Union members who have made a commitment are what is needed to steer the union’s direction, not those who decide on a whim to come in or leave. I can assure you that the long-standing union members who have made a conscious decision to be a part of the union and work not just for themselves but for their fellow employees do not appreciate the employees that attempt to jump in and out just so they can vote, or jump in when they are faced with a disciplinary situation.

One of the benefits that we offer to our members is the chance to purchase supplemental insurance at a reduced rate because of the size of our group. Allowing people to jump in and out of membership might stop us from being able to offer these services, which in turn could possibly affect the rates that employers pay for insurance, causing a strain on workers and employers. This helps no one, because in the long run, when the company does well so do our members.

Imagine, for a moment, if employees could change their minds on their health care whenever they wanted. Would that not amount to an administrative nightmare? There is a reason that most companies have open enrollment only once per year.

We understand that no one is requiring union membership to work a union job. We are also not dealing with children here. We are talking about adults. If someone joins the union, they should be held accountable for their decision and not be allowed to just leave at any time. Establishing a minimum time is the fairest way for both union members and their employers, and we believe that one year is a fair commitment that eases the administrative burden.

We thank you for your time, and please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely

John Garretson II
Business Manager / Financial Secretary

