

# Rabbis Urge Senator Specter to Support The Employee Free Choice Act

PHILADELPHIA JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE · Philadelphia Metropolitan Area, 1816 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103

ידיענד ארבעטער-קאמיטע

Dear Senator Specter:

**We, the undersigned rabbis and rabbinical students, write to express our strong support for the Employee Free Choice Act.**

Every major religion is sympathetic to the laborer. Judaism was early among the major religions in its assertion that labor involved more than mere economic activity. The commandment to observe the Sabbath was as much an affirmation of human dignity as of divine authority. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work." But the seventh day was to be holy—holy in the eyes of God, but equally important—holy in its respect for all who work. As it is written in Deuteronomy: "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, but you must pay him his wages on the same day, for he is needy and urgently depends on it." (24:14-15)

It is not always easy to translate the sanctity of labor into terms that have meaning today, a time in which the marketplace seems to have been elevated above all other holy altars. **We believe that the Employee Free Choice Act presents an opportunity to give concrete meaning to the often frustrated dream of a just society.**

To be sure, the Act is targeted with a smear campaign because it provides an effective and concrete way for workers to form and join unions. And it opens a path toward transformational change. Adoption of the Employee Free Choice Act would give working people the strength and the opportunity to emerge from the despair that so often encumbers their lives. It is no accident that deepening inequality has accompanied the 40-year assault on workers' right to organize; most economists now agree that the growing gap between rich and poor in our country has been an important factor underlying the current recession. The Employee Free Choice Act would help to re-establish a sense of balance in our economic system.

As you know, current federal labor law typically requires that workers vote at least twice for union representation—once by signing a union authorization card, and then a second time in a so-called "secret ballot" election. In practice, workers who want to form a union are often met with a concerted campaign by the employer to undermine the organizing effort. Because the union has no access to the workplace, the employer starts from a very advantageous position, which it often exploits to crush the aspirations of the workers.

Imagine, Senator, a political election in which Candidate A has total and exclusive access to the voters for 8 hours a day and can require voters to attend meetings at which he tells the voters all the reasons why voting for Candidate B would be bad for them and their community. Meanwhile, Candidate B has little or no information about who the voters are, can only have access to them by chasing them down individually at the beginning or end of each day, and has no systematic means for rebutting Candidate A's claims.

Imagine further, Senator, that Candidate A was found to have violated the law by intimidating voters or firing those who expressed support for Candidate B. And that the penalty for flagrant violations of the law consisted merely of a requirement to publicly apologize, months after the fact.

Senator, would you call such an election "free and fair"? Of course not. Yet that imaginary scenario mirrors the current NLRB election process. It is a broken process, a process that has been steadily eroded by a multi-billion dollar "union avoidance" industry. Why would any employer abide by labor law when the costs of non-compliance are so low?

**The Employee Free Choice Act would allow workers to decide how they want to form a union, free from fear of reprisal. It would require employers to recognize and bargain after the workers obtain a simple majority on duly signed and authenticated union authorization cards. It would provide real penalties for violations of the law. It would require that the parties achieve a first contract in 90 days.**

**The Employee Free Choice Act would, in sum, restore workplace democracy and fairness.** It is a way of balancing the scales of justice, of giving workers rights that most of us would take for granted.

**Thus, we urge you, Senator Specter, to add your name to the growing list of sponsors of the Employee Free Choice Act. It is the right thing to do.**

## SIGNED

Institutions for identification purposes only

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For the full list of signers, see [www.jewishlabor.org](http://www.jewishlabor.org).

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