

# Workers' Rights Amendment: What's in it and how Democrats and Republicans are sizing it up



Darren Bailey, left, and J.B. Pritzker are candidates for Illinois governor in the 2022 general election.



**Marni Pyke**

Posted 9/20/2022 5:00 AM

As gubernatorial rival Darren Bailey campaigned downstate Monday, Gov. J.B. Pritzker rallied the Democratic base in Chicago with a plug for workers' rights that are on the ballot Nov. 8.

"We need to make union organizing a constitutional right and stop Republican efforts to eliminate collective bargaining," Pritzker said at a Laborers' International Union of

North America training center. "So this November we will pass the Workers' Rights Amendment."

The proposed amendment to the Illinois Constitution would give employees "the fundamental right to organize and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing for the purpose of negotiating wages, hours, and working conditions, and to protect their economic welfare and safety at work," according to a General Assembly resolution.

The amendment also seeks to prohibit any laws that would interfere or diminish the rights of workers to organize.

State Sen. Bailey of Xenia, who on Monday kicked off a four-day bus tour in Belleville, opposes the policy, and so do numerous Republicans. They argue it will give government unions too much power and cause tax hikes because of skyrocketing salaries.

"Darren Bailey doesn't believe in your right to collectively organize for fair wages and better working conditions, health insurance and paid time off," Pritzker told a crowd of workers in LIUNA, or the Laborers' International Union of North America.

GOP leaders have contended that the amendment is actually "a disguised tax referendum, a Trojan horse that, if passed, is projected to cost a typical family over \$2,100 in additional property taxes within the next four years," Illinois Republican Party Chairman Don Tracy said in a recent statement.

That doesn't mean Republicans are anti-worker, Tracy noted. "We believe in hard work and personal responsibility. We are pro-growth, pro-business, and pro-worker. As a direct result of the important right to organize and collectively bargain, unions have benefited our brothers and sisters in the trades, business, and public safety."

Union officials have pointed to former Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner, who weakened requirements for contractors to hire laborers with collective bargaining units at state agencies such as the Illinois tollway.

"When passed, the Workers' Rights Amendment will solidify (for) all workers the right to collective bargaining if they choose regardless what political party is in power," said Mark Guethle, an official with the Painters District Council 30 and Kane County Democratic Party chairman.

A study (<https://illinoiseipi.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/ilepi-pmcr-workers-rights-amendment-and-illinois-jobs-final.pdf>) by Illinois Economic Policy Institute and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign researchers found that union members pay higher taxes than nonunion members. It also noted that Illinois workers earn about 15% more than those in states that don't support collective bargaining.

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