

Prepared Testimony of Tom Guyer

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Elyria, Ohio

Good afternoon. My name is Tom Guyer, and I am a parole officer in Elyria, Ohio, a proud member of SEIU District 1199, a U.S. Army veteran, and a registered Republican who voted for Governor Kasich last November.

I come before you today, and I spoke before a crowd of over 15,000 people in Columbus one week ago today, because I am very concerned about what is happening in our country under the guise of solving budget problems. Politicians in my home state of Ohio and many other states are making proposals for so-called “budget repairs” that are really a toolkit for not only shattering our fragile economic recovery, but for putting our public safety at risk, too.

Anti-collective bargaining legislation like the S.B. 5 bill that passed Ohio’s state senate by a one-vote margin Wednesday will not only destroy the middle class in our state, it will hurt our communities. It will hinder our teachers, our fire fighters, and our police officers in their line of duty. In my field, public safety in general, and corrections and probation, specifically, it will hamper the ability of my fellow parole officers to effectively supervise violent offenders who are on the streets and in your neighborhoods.

Prior to collective bargaining, parole officers in Ohio had no body armor. We were paid a poverty wage. We were subject to the good ole boy way of thinking; if you were liked, your job was protected regardless of how poorly you did it.

Collective bargaining has given Ohio parole officers the ability to negotiate with the state and, as a direct result, we now have body armor, weapons, and ongoing professional training. Through collective bargaining, we have made great strides in how we supervise convicted offenders.

If Ohio’s anti-collective bargaining passes our legislature, I am afraid it will allow the State of Ohio to hire inexperienced officers at a lower wage. How would you like to have new parole officers – with limited training and experience – supervising the felons who live in your neighborhood?

Ohio is facing an \$8 billion budget shortfall in the next two years. How will severely curtailing collective bargaining for all public workers – including police, fire fighters and corrections officers – help fix that?

It is through collective bargaining that Ohio public employees agreed to make sacrifices – including paying an increased share of our healthcare costs – that saved our state \$250 million in 2008 alone.

Through collective bargaining, Ohio's teachers and other public servants agreed to pay cuts, wage freezes and also staff reductions, which increased their personal workloads.

Through collective bargaining, my own union, SEIU, agreed to five pay cuts in nine years.

Time and time again, it is through collective bargaining that public sector employers and our public employee organizations – unions – collaborate to reach agreements that recognize and effectively address the dilemmas faced by all in these times of economic instability.

On a more personal note, dismantling collective bargaining in Ohio will have a direct effect on my family. My wife is an elementary education teacher who has her masters' degree plus 30 hours of additional education and has been teaching for 13 years. I am a Senior Parole Officer with 15 years experience. Without collective bargaining in Ohio, my wife and I could have our wages and benefits cut without our input, and we could see our safety and that of the people we serve compromised. If that is what we face, we will seriously consider relocating to another state.

It has been an honor to testify before you today, thank you for your time. In closing I would like to say: I am a public safety employee, and I am a union member. We are the middle class. We are not the problem. Every day in this country, we are part of the solution.