

Michigan Chamber Board Opposes Proposed Constitutional Amendment to Allow Collective Bargaining, Binding Arbitration for State Employees

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors last week voted unanimously to oppose Proposal 3, the proposed Constitutional Amendment to grant state employees with the constitutional right to collective bargaining with binding arbitration when the union and the state cannot agree on a contract.

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20000320/DEM039>)

"State employees already have collective bargaining," said Robert LaBrant, Senior Vice President of Political Affairs and General Counsel for the Michigan Chamber. "This Constitutional Amendment would give all state employees compulsory binding arbitration. Currently, only State Police troopers have binding arbitration."

Citing Senate Fiscal Agency data, LaBrant said arbitration could cost state taxpayers as much as \$60 million annually and back pay awards could cost state taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars since the average arbitration award is issued 22 months after the contract is supposed to start.

"If Proposal 3 is adopted, clearly the unions would have all the advantages," noted LaBrant. "Proposal 3 tilts the playing field. For example, Proposal 3 says that the state must bargain in good faith, but not the union. The union may call for arbitration, but not the state."

"While Proposal 3 allows for arbitration, it does not specifically prohibit strikes by state civil servants," added LaBrant. "The courts, at some time, will have to decide whether or not state employees are permitted under collective bargaining to go on strike."

LaBrant noted that police and firefighters currently have had binding arbitration under state law. "Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, who was the sponsor of that legislation as a State Senator, regretted his sponsorship when the cost of arbitration to the City of Detroit nearly bankrupted the city while he was mayor."

"Proposal 3 is bad public policy and should be soundly defeated," concluded LaBrant.

The Michigan Chamber is a statewide business organization representing approximately 7,000 employers, trade associations and local chambers of commerce. The Michigan Chamber was established in 1959 to be an advocate for Michigan's job providers in the legislative, political and legal process.

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CONTACT: Bob LaBrant, Senior V.P., Political Affairs of Michigan Chamber of Commerce, +1-517-371-2100

Web site: <http://www.michamber.com/>

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