



CITY COUNCILMEMBER
RIGEL ROBINSON
DISTRICT 7

12

CONSENT CALENDAR
March 23, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson (Author), Councilmember Terry Taplin (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsor)
Subject: Support for AB 314: Legislature Employer-Employee Relations Act

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and Senator Nancy Skinner in support of Assembly Bill 314, which would grant all employees of the California State Legislature the right to unionize and otherwise collectively bargain for improved wages and working conditions.

BACKGROUND

AB 314, introduced by Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, would expand collective bargaining rights currently enjoyed by California state employees to also cover employees of the Legislature, who are presently excluded from the benefits granted by the 1977 State Employer-Employee Relations Act. This bill would 1) grant legislative aides and other employees of the California State Legislature the right to form unions and otherwise collectively bargain for better pay and working conditions, and 2) make interfering or obstructing the collective bargaining of Legislature employees a finable misdemeanor.

Entry-level legislative staff are currently paid annual salaries that can go as low as \$36,000, not far above minimum wage.¹ Employees facing financial challenges or obstacles to long-term career viability see correlative increases in absenteeism,² as well as decreased productivity while on the job.³ Granting legislative aides and other employees of the Legislature the ability to collectively bargain would pay meaningful dividends in terms of the well-being, and accordingly, the ability of those staffers. This is particularly true for Black and Hispanic staffers, among whom union membership yields especially stark increases in pay (13.7% and 20.1% increases compared to nonunionized Black and Hispanic workers, respectively).⁴

¹ https://www.assembly.ca.gov/sites/assembly.ca.gov/files/Salaries/nov30_2020_lora_roster.pdf

²

https://www.lockton.com/whitepapers/Finding_the_Links_Between_Retirement_Stress_and_Health.pdf

³ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/private-company-services/publications/assets/pwc-2017-employee-wellness-survey.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.epi.org/publication/why-unions-are-good-for-workers-especially-in-a-crisis-like-covid-19-12-policies-that-would-boost-worker-rights-safety-and-wages/>

The collective bargaining rights that AB 314 grants to employees of the California State Legislature would put them on equal footing with all other state employees, and pave the way for a legislative staffing body inoculated against financial stress and demoralization. The Berkeley City Council should support AB 314, and send the attached letter of support to Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and Senator Nancy Skinner.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No impact.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170
Cameron Stimac, Intern

Attachments:

1: Letter of support

2: Bill text

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB314

March 23, 2021

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Assemblymember, 80th District
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: City of Berkeley's Support for Assembly Bill 314

Dear Assemblymember Gonzalez,

The Berkeley City Council would like to convey our full support for Assembly Bill 314, which extends the right to unionize and otherwise collectively bargain for improved wages and working conditions to all employees of the California State Legislature.

AB 314 represents a much-needed step in rebuilding the collective bargaining power of American workers, a necessity demonstrated all too clearly as COVID-19 continues unabated across the country. During the pandemic, legislative staffers have assisted thousands of residents with filing unemployment claims and navigating other state relief programs. These workers directly serve their community by handling constituent casework and playing a critical role in passing legislation that benefits all Californians. Too often, they are underpaid for their work.

We believe that this bill's capacity to improve the well-being, productivity, and diversity of legislative staff make this a change long overdue. The Berkeley City Council supports AB 314 and thanks you for taking the lead on this important issue.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council

CC: Senator Nancy Skinner
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks

