

New Haven Peoples Center

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Testimony to Education Committee
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Rep. Andrew Fleischmann, Co-Chair Education Committee
Sen. Andrea Stillman, Co-Chair Education Committee

Members of the Education Committee,

Labor education is integral to the mission of the New Haven Peoples Center. As a place where workers have come to organize for better wages and working conditions through unions, we have seen that this organization of working people has been of benefit to the entire community.

Over the years, we have often experienced the excitement and wonder of high school students as they learn for the first time at the Peoples Center about the history of working people in their own community and the nation. Some of these students express puzzlement as to why they have to learn this outside of school, and why the stories and role of workers and their organizations are not in their regular school curriculum.

Labor history is the story of democracy in America. It is the story of how many of the things we now take for granted were accomplished, including wages and hours laws, health and safety laws, child labor laws, civil rights laws, grievance procedures and bargaining agreements that have protected workers on the job and raised up their communities.

We have found that grade school students become stronger participants in their community when they learn about the history that shaped their families and their future.

"Oh, now I see," exclaimed one high school senior recently after learning about how workers at the Winchester factory came to form a union and how this raised the quality of life and improved the economy of New Haven.

The need to develop and include a curriculum for labor history arises because when this component is missing, students do not get a complete picture of what our country is and how it works. Labor history serves to inspire students of the relevance of their education, and to encourage them to be full participants in society. It gives youth the knowledge they need in order to think and reason for themselves about their own lives and their own dreams and goals for the future.

Thank you.