



Mass**COSH**

Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10/5/2017

Contact:

Jeff Newton, MassCOSH Communications Coordinator

(O) (617) 825-7233 x14

Labor Safety Advocates Encouraged by Senate Passage of Worker Protection Bill

BOSTON Today, after more than a decade of steadfast advocacy by labor advocates, a bill extending OSHA protections to Massachusetts public employees has passed the Massachusetts Senate, where it now awaits a critical vote by the House.

S.2167, An Act Further Defining Standards of Employee Safety updates Massachusetts' antiquated public sector safety law, which had not clearly defined what measures public agencies, such as the Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards, should employ to keep workers safe. The legislation would finally protect public workers in the state with the same OSHA safety standards that cover all private sector workers. If passed by the House, Massachusetts would join 26 other states that provide at least OSHA level protections for all public employees.

The bill is supported by the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health (MassCOSH), Massachusetts AFL-CIO, National Association of Government Employees - Service Employees International Union (NAGE-SEIU), Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists (MOSES), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 93, Service Employees International Union 888, Service Employees International Union 509, Massachusetts Teachers Association, Massachusetts Nurses Association, and Teamsters Local 25.

Currently, Massachusetts General Law Chapter 149 Section 6 gives the state Department of Labor Standards (DLS) the authority to respond to complaints, and investigate injuries and deaths. DLS uses this authority to encourage and inform public agencies that they expect them to comply with OSHA regulations as a minimum standard of employee protection. However, current state law does not directly cite OSHA regulations as the minimum safety standard for city, town, higher education and authority workers.

"Public employees repair our roads, remove our waste, care for our disabled, and more, exposing themselves to proven hazards that cause needless injury," said Jodi Sugerman-Brozan, MassCOSH's

Executive Director. "Each week, an average of 28 municipal workers suffer injuries serious enough to be out of work for five days or more. Today, the Senate has taken a critical step forward in ensuring that safety measures and systems are in place to protect these hard-working individuals and now it's time for the House to do the same."

The bill is preceded by an executive branch worker safety law that went into effect in Massachusetts in 2014, placing approximately 36,000 executive branch workers under OSHA safety standards for the first time.

"When Massachusetts workers arrive on the job each day, their health and safety protections shouldn't vary depending on whether they work in the public sector or private sector," said Steven A. Tolman, President of Massachusetts AFL-CIO. "This legislation finally equalizes those protections for all workers in the Commonwealth, no matter where they work. We thank the Senate for taking action and strongly urge the House to act on this important legislation swiftly."

Public agencies spend millions of dollars in workers' compensation and lost time costs. According to Liberty Mutual's Research Institute for Safety, employers save \$4 to \$6 for every dollar spent on a health and safety program. Furthermore, the federal government has a grant program that matches state dollars one to one to fund the technical assistance and enforcement of public employee safety programs. Advocates note that if S.2167 becomes law, the state would be eligible for these funds boosting the capacity of DLS to protect workers dramatically.

"We appreciate the legislature's ongoing commitment to enhancing worker safety," said NAGE-SEIU Executive Vice President Theresa McGoldrick. "The Senate has continually been a leader on OSHA expansion and today they proved it once again. NAGE is committed to advocating for the passage of laws to protect the health and safety of our members, and we look forward to working with the House to finish this important initiative."

"For too long the state's scientists and engineers have been subject to varying safety standards. While our members who work for the Commonwealth have been covered by the national OSHA standard since 2014, those who work at the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority have not enjoyed the same protections," said Joe Dorant, President of the Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists. "We are thrilled to see S. 2167 pass the Senate and hope the House will act quickly to expand OSHA protections for all workers."

###

About the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health (MassCOSH)

MassCOSH strives to ensure that all workers earn their living and return home alive and well. MassCOSH unites workers, unions and community groups with environmental and health activists, to end dangerous work conditions, to organize for safe, secure jobs, and to advocate for healthy communities. Through training, technical assistance and building community/labor alliances, MassCOSH mobilizes its members and develops leaders in the movement to end unsafe work conditions. www.masscosh.org