

**Testimony of Lillian Roberts, DC37, AFSCME Executive Director
Before New York City Council Committee on Civil Service and Labor
Regarding Resolution No. 690-A**

Good afternoon. My name is Lillian Roberts, Executive Director of DC37, which represents 160,000 active and retired employees of New York City. I want to thank you, Chairman Sanders and all members of the Committee, for consideration of Resolution 690-A which proclaims that "...the New York City Council stands in solidarity with public workers in Wisconsin, Ohio, and in other states around the country as their struggle for dignity and economic security is one shared by all New Yorkers and Americans." I strongly urge this Committee and the entire City Council to pass this resolution.

There is a great lie being perpetuated in the media that public employees having a voice on the job through collective bargaining, like private sector workers, is the cause of budget deficits across the country. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to Media Matters for America: "In a February 19 *New Republic* article, Joseph McCartin, an associate professor of history and director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University, wrote that the contention that "[w]e can no longer afford collective bargaining" is "bogus":

"[I]n the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, conservative, anti-labor politicians like Governor Walker are trying out a new and potentially more potent anti-union argument: We can no longer afford collective bargaining. The wages, health benefits, and pensions of government workers, these opponents say, are driving states into deep and dangerous deficits.

Yet this contention is every bit as bogus as the alarmist arguments put forth by the anti-union crusaders of the 1970s. Contrary to Walker's assertion, there is no direct correlation between public-sector collective bargaining and yawning state budget deficits. According to data gathered by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, while Wisconsin projects a state budget deficit of 12.8 percent for FY 2012, North Carolina, which does not allow government workers to bargain, faces a significantly higher deficit: 20 percent. Ohio, whose Republican governor John Kasich has also made clear his desire to roll back collective bargaining, has a deficit that is only about half the size of non-union North Carolina's. Clearly, then, state budget deficits we are now witnessing are not the product of collective bargaining, but rather reflect the differential impact of the current recession on individual states, as well as the integrity of state fiscal practices (such as whether they raise enough in taxes to pay for the essential services they provide)." [The New Republic, 2/19/11, italics in original]

In fact, Media Matters for America concludes: "**CBPP Data Show All Five States In Which Bargaining Is Illegal Face Budget Shortfalls.** According to data compiled by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), the five states in which collective bargaining is explicitly illegal (Texas, Georgia, South Carolina,

North Carolina, and Virginia) all face budget shortfalls in FY2012. According to CBPP, Texas and North Carolina are at or above the average expected state budget shortfall in FY2012. [CBPP, 2/10/11]

Scott Walker's attacks on the working families of Wisconsin and his extreme power grab to workers of collective bargaining rights has been met at every turn with huge and united opposition. Consistent demonstrations show that opposition is as strong as ever and growing by the day and national polling show the public is overwhelmingly on the side of workers.

In response to Walker and the Republicans' backroom maneuver to rig a vote under the cover of darkness that strips 100s of thousands of Wisconsin workers of their rights, Saturday was the largest statewide day of action ever – culminating in historic crowds in Madison to protest Scott Walker's power grab. The sleazy legislative tactics of Scott Walker and the Republican Senators to ram this bill through in the dark of night are not making us go away, they're making us stronger.

Nearly every political observer on both sides of the aisle agrees – Scott Walker has won a Pyrrhic victory using sleazy legislative tactics, but has already lost the overall political war. Walker's disapprovals are near 60%, he continues to further unite and broaden the opposition against him, and his extreme overreach and power grab vs. will cost as many as eight Republican Senators their jobs through recall elections.

Recall elections in the districts of eight Republican Senators who refused to abandon Scott Walker's rapidly-sinking ship are well underway and experienced an enormous surge in momentum. Thousands of grassroots volunteers are nearly half the way to collecting the number of signatures required statewide to force a recall election. Statewide television advertising is targeting individual Senators and support for Walker's bill that 74% of Wisconsinites opposed. And early polling suggests Republicans facing recall are losing badly in key targeted districts around the state. Also, last Friday, Dane County Circuit Judge Maryann Sumi granted a temporary restraining order that will block the publishing of Governor Walker's collective bargaining law. The emergency order blocking publication was initiated by Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne who filed a lawsuit alleging that a joint legislative committee violated Wisconsin's open meetings law when it hastily scheduled a hearing on Walker's bill.

Scott Walker's rapidly-sinking ship will only continue to take on water in the coming months, as Wisconsinites learn of the devastating effects his budget will have – including record cuts to education, health care, and support for our seniors. Despicably, Walker's budget achieves balance on the backs of the lower and middle classes – actually raising taxes on the lowest-income Wisconsinites, while giving over \$100 million in tax breaks to the wealthy and his corporate donors.

Scott Walker seems not to care about any of this, as he is being crowned the darling of the extreme right-wing nationally. As Walker and other GOP presidential contenders continue to discuss his rising national profile, it is voters at home in Wisconsin that are paying the price. Walker's political ambitions know no bounds, and he doesn't care how many Wisconsin workers or even members of his own Senate GOP caucus he has to take his 'baseball bat' to in his pursuit of higher office.

Hard working public employees having a voice on the job is not the cause of the Great Recession or the resulting budget deficits. In fact, unions such as DC37 and our national union AFSCME and the AFL-CIO have helped millions of workers achieve the American Dream by entering the middleclass and have provided them a voice and dignity on the job. We will continue to advocate for policies that protect and expand the middleclass. However, the rich and powerful, led by the Koch brothers, have an aggressive campaign to expand their wealth and power. They know that unions are the last obstacle to their total domination of the economy at all our expense. Governors Walker and Kasich are just the latest right wing politicians doing their bidding as they try to crush the voice of working people. At a time when the income inequality in America, New York State and this City is unprecedented, it is not fair or wise that working people are the only members of our society that are asked to sacrifice during these difficult times. Instead of cutting rights, jobs, and vital public services, our elected officials must insist that the wealthy among us must also sacrifice; after all, they actually can afford to sacrifice unlike the struggling middleclass. For example, while Mayor Bloomberg blames his proposals for massive layoffs and other cuts on reduced municipal aid from Governor Cuomo, he and Governor Cuomo have refused to support the extension of the Personal Income Tax on the wealthiest New Yorkers. That means they support a \$5 billion TAX CUT for the wealthiest 3% of New Yorkers while they call for massive cuts in center based public day care, healthcare, our seniors and other public services and the jobs of thousands of dedicated public servants who deliver the services that millions of New Yorkers depend on. Where is the shared sacrifice? The Koch brothers, and Governors Walker and Kasich would be proud of how they are protecting the rich and powerful in New York.

To conclude, the New York City Council has a proud history of standing up for working people. By passing resolution 690-A, and standing up for public employees "...struggle(ing) for dignity and economic security..." around the country, the City Council would build on this proud tradition. DC37 urges you to pass this resolution. Moreover, we look forward to working with you to adopt a fair budget and other policies. Let's make choices we can be proud of; choices that promote a better New York for ALL, not just the wealthy.

Thank you.



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Testimony of Teamster Local 237 President Gregory Floyd
In Support of Resolution 690-A

Today, public employees and all working people, are being unfairly attacked, not only in Wisconsin and Ohio, but across our nation ----- and here in New York as well. But, we stand tall in New York City. New York IS a labor town and we are proud of the work we do. We will come together and work towards fair solutions to address the challenges that we all face.

I thank the Council members who have introduced and who support resolution 690-A. I welcome your solidarity with our nation's public workers.

For far too long, the public debate has been dominated by those who denigrate public employees and who seek to eliminate or privatize public services.

We should not forget the cause of the budget deficits we currently face – it was the reckless actions of Wall Street Executives and Bankers that created our near economic collapse – and in turn led to the revenue shortages with which every level of government is now grappling.

The right-wing strategy has been to take advantage of budget shortfalls for their own gain. They want to sweep financial reform, regulation and taxpayer bailouts under the carpet.

Politicians like Governor Walker of Wisconsin have attempted to focus anger on public workers instead. They want to tear down the shrinking middle class, and do not believe that workers are entitled to basic rights, fair pay or secure retirements.

Governor Walker has clearly demonstrated that bashing public employees has nothing to do with budget reform or responsible governance. And I think that the voters understand that.

Unions created the middle class, the engine of the American economy for most of the last century; the community members, consumers and workers who made this country great. Demanding that working families pay for deficits – whether through their wages, benefits or loss of their union rights – is no solution.

Instead we must ask the most advantaged in our society - profitable corporations and wealthy individuals - to pay their fair share.

One of the biggest threats we face here in New York is the spread of privatization. In addition to undermining our civil service system, contracting out is often more costly and produces poor results. Have we learned anything from the CityTime payroll scandal?

We all hope that the events in Wisconsin, Ohio and around the nation are a turning point. If our government and economy were guided by the objective of restoring, instead of destroying the middle class, every worker would have the same sort of benefits that public workers have and that most private sectors workers once had.

Not only does this resolution affirm New York's position as the most pro-union state in the nation, it recognizes the critical work that public employees perform as well as their basic right to collective bargaining.

Thank you, council members, for your support in our struggle.