

Deceptive 'Right to Work' Laws Hurt Everyone

By many measures, the quality of life is worse in states with “right to work” laws. Wages are lower, poverty levels are higher, people are less likely to have health insurance, and resources for education are lower—even infant mortality and the likelihood of being killed on the job are higher.

States with right to work laws:

Have Lower Wages and Incomes

- On average, workers in states with right to work laws make \$6,109 (12.1%) less annually than workers in other states (\$44,401, compared with \$50,511).¹
- Median household income in states with these laws is \$8,174 (13.9%) less than in other states (\$50,712 vs. \$58,886).²
- 29.6% of jobs in right to work states were in low-wage occupations, compared with 22.8% of jobs in other states.³

Have Lower Rates of Health Insurance Coverage

- People younger than 65 in states with right to work laws are more likely to be uninsured (13.0%, compared with 9.4% in free-bargaining states).⁴
- Only 47% of private-sector employers in states with right to work laws offer insurance coverage to their employees, compared with 52.2% in other states.⁵ That difference is even more pronounced among small employers (with fewer than 50 workers)—only 30.1% offer workers health insurance, compared with 38.1% of small employers in other states.⁶

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (all industries, all establishments, average annual pay), 2014 data. Numbers are rounded (\$50,510.58 and \$44,401.17).

² U.S. Census Bureau, Table H-8. Median Household Income by State: 1984 to 2014, <http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/time-series/historical-income-households/h08.xls>.

³ CFED, Asset and Opportunity Scorecard, Low Wage Jobs, 2013, <http://scorecard.assetsandopportunity.org/latest/measure/low-wage-jobs>.

⁴ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Health Insurance Coverage of Nonelderly 0–64, 2014, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/nonelderly-0-64/#>.

⁵ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Percent of Private Sector Establishments that Offer Health Insurance to their Employees, 2013, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/percent-of-firms-offering-coverage/>.

⁶ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Percent of Private Sector Establishments That Offer Health Insurance to their Employees, by firm size, 2013, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/firms-offering-coverage-by-size/#>.

- Workers in right to work states also pay a larger share of their health insurance premiums, on average, than those in free-bargaining states (28.5% of the premium, compared with 25.4% in free-bargaining states).⁷

Have Higher Poverty and Infant Mortality Rates

- Poverty rates are higher in states with right to work laws (15.3% overall and 21.4% for children), compared with poverty rates of 12.8% overall and 18.0% for children in states without these laws.⁸
- The infant mortality rate is 12.4% higher in states with right to work laws.⁹

Invest Less in Education

- States with right to work laws spend 32.5% less per pupil on elementary and secondary education than other states.¹⁰

Have Higher Workplace Fatality Rates

- The rate of workplace deaths is 49% higher in states with these laws, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹¹

⁷ CFED, Employee Share of the Premium, 2014,

<http://scorecard.assetsandopportunity.org/latest/measure/employee-share-of-premium>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, POV46: Poverty Status by State: 2014 Below 100% and 50% of Poverty — All Ages, www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032015/pov/pov46_weight_10050_1.xls; U.S. Census Bureau, POV46: Poverty Status by State: 2014 Below 100% and 50% of Poverty — People Under 18 Years of Age, Weighted Person Count, www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032015/pov/pov46_weight_10050_3.xls.

⁹ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Infant Mortality Rates (deaths per 1,000 live births), 2013, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/infant-death-rate/#>.

¹⁰ National Education Association, Ranking & Estimates - Rankings of the States 2015 and Estimates of School Statistics 2016, Table H-11. Current Expenditures for Public K-12 Schools Per Student in Fall Enrollment, 2014-15 (\$), www.nea.org/assets/docs/2016_NEA_Rankings_And_Estimates.pdf.

Note: Wisconsin was excluded from the free-bargaining states vs. right to work state analysis for education spending because the state enacted its' right to work law in 2015. The impact of right to work policies would not have been fully experienced in the 2014–2015 school year. In addition, West Virginia is included as a free bargaining state in this analysis of 2014–2015 school year data because the state passed right to work legislation in 2016.

¹¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2014, www.bls.gov/news.release/cfoi.nr0.htm.