



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Balto. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

HJ 3 - Ratifying the Federal Child Labor Amendment House Rules & Executive Nominations Committee March 3, 2025

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HJ 3. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HJ 3 adopts the 1924 proposed Federal constitutional amendment which stated that Congress has the power to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age. Unfortunately, Maryland rejected the resolution in 1927.

One of the crowning achievements of the American labor movement was the push to protect and exclude children from the workforce, so their time could be better spent in education and enjoying childhood. Businesses fought hard to keep children in factories, fields, and mines, arguing that parents had the ultimate right to decide what their kids did with their time. Reformers kept organizing until laws and Supreme Court interpretations granted that the state had a right and an interest in regulating child labor. This victory was never complete as young workers in the agricultural industry were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act and fight to this day for the same protections that other children have.¹

Nearly a century later, states are chipping away at their child labor protections in the name of addressing workforce shortages rather than increasing pay and benefits.² Since 2021, 28 states have introduced or enacted legislation to weaken child labor protections with at least five since 2023 introducing legislation to expand youth employment in hazardous occupations and three more in 2024.³ A 2023 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that the number of minors employed in

¹ Josh Christenson, "'Alarming' rise in migrant child labor under Biden, up 88% since 2019: GOP senator." New York Post. March 5, 2024.

² Jacob Bogage, "In a tight labor market, some states look to another type of worker: Children." Washington Post. February 11, 2023.

³ Nina Mast, "Child labor remains a key state legislative issue in 2024." Economic Policy Institute. February 7, 2024.

violation of child labor laws increased by 37%.⁴ Some of these proposals have been called, “Irresponsible and dystopian.”⁵

Reported child labor violations in the country are at their highest in decades; in 2023, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) concluded 955 child labor investigations compared to 835 the year before and as of October 2023, had 800 more cases pending.⁶

With labor force participation among young adults recovering to pre-pandemic levels at a rate higher than overall labor force participation⁷, the recent push to roll back child labor protections is not part of some effort to teach future workers about the value of a dollar and learn valuable skills for their future.⁸ This is about exploitable cheap labor, with few rights and protections. The children of millionaires will not be the ones working night shifts on the slaughterhouse floors.

Young adults who drop out of school to work have the lowest earnings and highest employment rates of all workers⁹, making federal action necessary in stepping up where states have failed. At a time of significant uncertainty in our country regarding labor protections and standards, it is necessary to ensure that clear language in the Constitution prevents any ambiguity. Child labor must be stopped.

We urge a favorable report on HJ 3.

⁴ Jennifer Sherer and Nina Mast, “Child labor laws are under attack in states across the country.” Economic Policy Institute. March 14, 2023.

⁵ Mark Peterson, “‘Irresponsible and dystopian’: Indiana Senate discusses child labor bill.” WNDU. March 5, 2024.

⁶ Lauren Kaori Gurley., “Child labor violations soared in fiscal 2023.” The Washington Post. October 19, 2023.

⁷ Jennifer Sherer and Nina Mast, “Child labor laws are under attack in states across the country.” Economic Policy Institute. March 14, 2023.

⁸ Hannah Dreier, “Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.” New York Times. February 28, 2023.

⁹ Jennifer Sherer and Nina Mast, “Child labor laws are under attack in states across the country.” Economic Policy Institute. March 14, 2023.