

Permanently Establishing Tennessee as a Right-to-Work State

Issue Summary:

Under right-to-work laws, states have the authority to determine whether workers can be required to join a labor union to get or keep a job.

Currently, 27 states and Guam have given workers a choice when it comes to union membership. Labor unions still operate in those states, but workers cannot be compelled to become members as a requirement of their job.

Tennessee: Adopted in 1947, Tennessee has one of the oldest right-to-work laws in the country, second only behind Florida who first passed the law in 1943. A constitutional resolution (Senate Joint Resolution 648) to allow citizens to vote to embed right-to-work into the Tennessee state constitution was passed on June 17th, 2020 and signed by both speakers. The 112th General Assembly will now be required to adopt an identical resolution before the constitutional initiative is placed on Tennessee ballots in 2022.

Key Points:

- The resolution was required to pass in the 2020 legislative session by a simple majority and in the next General Assembly by two-thirds before it is placed on the 2022 ballot.
- [Senate Joint Resolution 0002](#) was pre-filed on November 3, 2020 by Senator Brian Kelsey for the upcoming 2021 legislative session. At the time of publication, the Senate Resolution has 21 cosponsors, all Republican senators.
- The resolution states that it is “unlawful for any person, corporation, association, or this state or its political subdivisions to deny or attempt to deny employment to any person by reason of the person's membership in, affiliation with, resignation from, or refusal to join or affiliate with any labor union or employee organization.”
- In 2020, the U.S. House passed the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. The PRO Act would undermine worker rights, ensnare employers in unrelated labor disputes, disrupt the economy, and force individual Americans to pay union dues regardless of their wishes.
- Constitutionalizing Tennessee’s Right-to-Work law sends a clear message that our state prioritizes and values our sovereign ability to protect our right-to-work status.

2021 Tennessee Chamber Policy Agenda:

The Chamber believes Right-to-Work (RTW) is a critical element to Tennessee’s strong business climate. We will work to constitutionally embed RTW in order to keep the Volunteer State a premier destination for businesses.