

GOLDWATER

I N S T I T U T E

March 19th, 2025
Senator Susan Manchester
Chair, Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Re: Support SB 8

Madam Chair and Members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

My name is Brian Norman, and I'm writing to submit comments in support of SB 8 on behalf of the Goldwater Institute. The Goldwater Institute works in courtrooms, capitols and communities nationwide to protect individual liberty and fight government abuse, and the Institute has litigated against union release time and supported legislation to end the practice in multiple states.

This bill addresses what is perhaps one of the most shocking taxpayer abuses in modern America. Under a practice called "union release time," government agencies allow public employees to be released from the jobs for which they were hired and instead be assigned to work for a private labor organization, all while receiving full government pay and benefit without using personal time off.

While on release time, cities across Ohio pay city employees to work for private labor unions to engage in activities that directly support the mission of the union. These activities include allowing government-funded workers to lobby state and local governments and engage in partisan political activities. This means that taxpayers are paying the government to lobby itself. It also means that taxpayers are funding political activity with which many Ohioans disagree.

In 2020, the Goldwater Institute conducted a nationwide survey of government entities across the country – three from each state – to get a sense of how extensive release time is used.¹ The survey included data from the City of Columbus, the Columbus City School District and the Ohio Department of Corrections.

The City of Columbus government allowed for 38,469 hours of release time in 2020 at a reported cost of \$1,112,315. Multiple contracts allowed full release time for union presidents and other representatives, totaling 10 full-time release positions. The police union contract also allowed 4,000 hours for negotiations. Union employees also donate hours to a bank of hours for union officials to use.

In response to the Institute's public records request in 2020, the Ohio Department of Corrections reported 22,681 hours of release time at a reported cost of \$596,904. The state disclosure showed one person used 2,000 hours of union release time, the equivalent of a full-time release. Three others used more than 500 hours of release.

¹ Mark Flatten, "Money for Nothing," Goldwater Institute, Oct. 13, 2020, available at <https://goldwaterinstitute.org/money-for-nothing/>.

In the Columbus City School District, District officials claim that the district does not allow government-paid release time. However, two contracts had provisions for large banks of paid hours donated by the district. In the agreement covering teachers, 215 days (1,720 hours at eight hours per day) are granted for union business. A separate agreement with non-teachers authorizes 180 days, or 1,440 hours. Both agreements also have provisions allowing top union officials to be released without pay, or with reimbursement of salaries by the union. It is unclear who pays for benefits during extended leaves for union officials.

Public funds should advance the public's interest. Not private, special interests. And certainly not the political and lobbying activities of private organizations, including labor unions. This modest, but crucially important reform ensures that Ohio taxpayers are not forced to finance the political and lobbying activities of powerful special interest groups.

The Goldwater Institute applauds the Ohio legislature for considering this reform to protect taxpayers, and we urge your support of SB 8.

Sincerely,

Brian Norman
Director of State Affairs
Goldwater Institute