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Pennsylvania's Ghost Teachers

What is a Ghost Teacher?

- Collective bargaining agreements in many Pennsylvania school districts permit school employees to take a full-time leave of absence from the classroom to perform union work. This practice is also known as release time.
- While on leave doing union work, these “ghost teachers” remain on their school district’s payroll, accrue seniority, and retain pension benefits.

Ghost Teaching Examples

- In Philadelphia, most of the employees on leave have been working for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) for **at least 15 years**. This includes the union’s president, Jerry Jordan, who has been on leave for three decades.
- Currently, **16 ghost teachers are earning \$1.5 million this year while working for their union**. Although the PFT reimburses the school district for ghost teachers’ salaries, the contract does not require reimbursement. Moreover, there is no evidence the union reimburses the state for its share of pension payments made on behalf of ghost teachers.
- In Pittsburgh, the school district’s collective bargaining agreement allows for up to 6 teachers (plus part time staff) to work for the union at any one time. While the union must reimburse the district for union leave, employees accrue seniority in their absence.
 - In theory, under the state’s policy of seniority-based layoffs, a classroom teacher could be furloughed before a teacher on full-time union leave.
- Unlike in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, taxpayers in the Allentown School District pay for the entire salary and benefits of the school district’s union president. According to the **Fairness Center**, since 2000, state and local taxpayers have spent more than \$1.3 million subsidizing the salary of an Allentown Education Association employee.

Priorities for Reforming Ghost Teachers

Any reform concerning the practice of release time should include three key elements:

1. Prohibit ghost teachers from staying on a school district’s payroll. Public resources should not be used for any private political organization.
2. End seniority accrual for ghost teachers. Greater seniority means a salary increase, priority during layoffs, and “bumping privileges.” Employees making union work a career should not be given priority over those actually teaching in the classroom.

3. No pension benefit accruals for ghost teachers. Union employees involved in political activity should not participate in the taxpayer-funded pension system.

Current Legislative Reforms

- Representative Kristin Hill has introduced [HB 1649](#) to end the practice of release time. Senator Pat Stefano has introduced similar legislation, [SB 1140](#), in the Senate.
- Under both proposals, school employees would still be permitted up to 30 days, but no more than 3 consecutive days, to attend to union business each year.
- Representative Rick Saccone's [HB 2125](#) ends release time with two exceptions:
 - Statewide teachers' unions (like the American Federation of Teachers - Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania State Education Association) could have 3 officials on leave for up to 6 years.
 - School district employees may only be on leave for 15 total days each school year but no more than 3 consecutive days.
- HB 2125 would require government unions to fully reimburse taxpayers for the costs associated with release time.
- None of the legislation proposed prohibits unions from filling staff positions with their own resources.

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For more information on **Pennsylvania's Ghost Teachers**, visit
CommonwealthFoundation.org/ghost