



# AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

**American Federation  
of Labor and  
Congress of Industrial  
Organizations**

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March 26, 2021

Dear Trade Unionist:

On April 28, the labor movement will once again observe Workers Memorial Day to remember workers killed or injured on the job and to renew the fight for strong safety and health protections.

Fifty years ago, the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect after the tireless efforts of the labor movement, who drew major attention to work-related deaths and injuries, organized for safer working conditions and demanded action from their government. The OSH Act and Mine Safety and Health Act promised workers the right to a safe job. Unions and our allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality—winning protections that have made jobs safer and saved lives. After years of struggle, we won new rules to protect workers from deadly silica dust and beryllium, a stronger coal dust standard for miners, and stronger anti-retaliation protections for workers who report job injuries and defended them from corporate attacks. But there is much to be done before the promise to keep all workers safe on the job can be fulfilled.

Worker safety and worker voice go hand in hand. Decades of evidence shows that unionized workplaces are safer workplaces. This year, America's labor movement and our allies are launching a full-scale national campaign to pass the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which would give the tens of millions of workers who want to form a union a fair path to do so. The popularity of unions is at 65%—one of the highest marks since the OSH Act was implemented in 1971—and 60 million non-union workers say they would vote for a voice on the job today if given the chance.

Just as workers' collective voices have won stronger safety protections from their employers, together we advocate for stronger laws that hold employers accountable and help protect workers. In the past year, our nation and the world has faced the worst public health and workplace safety and health crisis of the last century, disproportionately affecting people of color in the essential workforce. Immediately and throughout this crisis, workers came together to demand and win job safety protections from this highly contagious virus. But the pandemic also exposed the weaknesses in the safety agencies' abilities to ensure workers are protected on the job and the structural failures that have prevented workers from organizing in their workplaces to demand safer working conditions.

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We must continue to fight and push forward to ensure safe jobs for all workers through strong unions and strong laws. Each year, thousands of workers are killed and millions more suffer injury or illness because of our jobs. Far too many workers die from preventable hazards and many more workers get sick from exposure to toxic chemicals. Many employers and workers never see OSHA in their workplace. Penalties are still too low to be a deterrent. Workplace safety agencies have been decimated by a reduction in staff and a stagnant budget. Workers are not adequately protected without retaliation to speak out against unsafe working conditions and to freely join a union.

In the 50th year of OSHA this April 28, we focus on the need to renew the promise of safe jobs for all of America's workers. The labor movement will renew our commitment to safe jobs for all and mobilize to pass the PRO Act, so that workers have a right to form a union and have a safety voice on the job. Workers need protections from COVID-19 and many other hazards that working people face every day: workplace violence, silica exposures in mining, heat illness, exposure to asbestos and other toxic chemicals, and other hazards. The labor movement also will work to strengthen OSHA and MSHA, increase their budgets, enforcement and other resources, and call for them to renew their commitment to protecting workers for the next 50 years. We will increase efforts to protect the safety and health of Black, Latino and immigrant workers who are disproportionately affected and especially targeted for speaking up against unsafe working conditions.

We urge you to get involved and organize observances, remembrances, actions, activities, or digital campaigns in your workplaces and communities to highlight the toll of job injuries and deaths and call for action to renew the promise to a safe job. We will stand united against the ongoing attacks on workers' rights and protections and have the freedom to organize for safer workplaces. We must and we will protect the right of every worker to a safe job and fight until that promise is fulfilled.

Enclosed are materials with ideas and information to assist you. Please let us know what you are planning by posting your event on the AFL-CIO's Workers Memorial Day website. For additional information, to order copies of materials and to download our digital toolkit, please visit the AFL-CIO website at [www.aflcio.org/WorkersMemorialDay](http://www.aflcio.org/WorkersMemorialDay), or contact the AFL-CIO Safety and Health Office at 202-637-5305 or [oshmail@aflcio.org](mailto:oshmail@aflcio.org).

Please join us this Workers Memorial Day, April 28, to honor the victims of workplace injury and illness and to keep fighting for the promise of safe jobs for all workers.

In solidarity,



Richard L. Trumka  
President

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Enclosures