

National Organization of Legal Services Workers
UAW Local 2320, AFL-CIO
256 West 38th Street, Suite 705, New York NY 10018
(800) UAW-2320 -- (212) 228-0992

Association of Legal Aid Attorneys
UAW Local 2325, AFL-CIO
50 Broadway, Ste 1600, New York NY 10004
(212) 343-0708



Guess What! Many Public Interest Lawyers are in Unions!

What Does It Mean to Belong to a Union?

Without a union, workers have little power over their pay and working conditions. Employers do not have to bargain with individual workers and can change pay and other working terms or fire workers at will.

When workers join together to collectively bargain they empower themselves and level the playing field with their employer. All workers have the legal and human right to join a union. With a union, employees have a legal right to bargain with their employer and to have the resulting agreement placed in an enforceable contract.

Who Can Be in a Union?

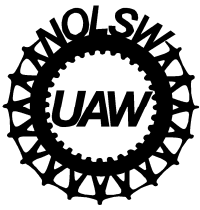
In a legal services office, lawyers, social workers, administrative staff, and organizers are eligible to be in a union all together: a “wall-to-wall” union. In some legal services offices, only some of the groups of staff have elected to unionize: for example, only the staff attorneys. Managers, supervisors, and confidential employees (people especially close to management) cannot be part of a union.

Staff Attorneys Have the Legal Right To:

- Join a union.
- Talk to co-workers about joining a union.
- Pass out union information and sign up co-workers in non-work areas on non-work time. (If your employer permits workers to discuss other non-work-related subjects in work areas and/or on work time, this policy must be evenly applied to union-related activity).
- Join with coworkers to seek better workplace conditions.

It is Against the Law for an Employer To:

- Interfere with, restrain or coerce workers exercising the above rights, such as by questioning them about their support for the union, using threats or promises to discourage support for the union, or disciplining or firing workers for joining or supporting the union.
- Form an employer-controlled or financed union.
- Refuse to bargain with the union chosen by its employees.



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What are the Benefits of Being Unionized?

No union can guarantee what will be in the contract—that is the product of negotiation with each employer. But, on average, unionized workers enjoy better wages and benefits than non-unionized workers. They also enjoy protection against unjust termination, a voice in workplace decisions, procedures for resolving workplace disputes, and the security of a written contract— which means that what they win at the table cannot be taken back on the whim of their employer.

Workers who unionize also help to raise workplace standards for all employees in their industry and community and become a part of a local, national and international network of solidarity, through which workers support one another in their individual struggles and pool their numbers and resources to bring about social, economic and political changes that benefit all working people.

Some Examples

Union members can't be terminated without cause.

Without a union, most workers are “at-will” employees, meaning they can be fired at any time for any non-discriminatory reason. Unionized workers can only be fired for “just cause.” You don't have to worry that debate or a disagreement with a supervisor will result in a pink slip. Most union contracts have strict and clear rules that management needs to follow in order to discipline or terminate someone.

We have health care, parental leave, vacation, and sick time.

Our benefits are guaranteed and cannot be changed during the contract. They apply to everyone and are not given out based on favoritism or job category.

We never have to face a problem alone.

We have support in the event that an issue arises. If you are overwhelmed by work or haven't gotten sufficient training, the union can help you negotiate your workload and hours, and get the training and support you need. If you are facing discipline, the union will help defend you.

Union members get a seat at the table.

In non-union organization, management gets to make whatever rules and changes they want. In a unionized organization, management has to negotiate with staff over proposed changes – they can't impose them unilaterally. You get a voice in decision-making.