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**Statement by Ted Kirsch,
President, AFT-Pennsylvania,
On the So-Called ‘Strike-Free Education Act’—HB 1369**

The Pennsylvania House Education Committee is conducting a hearing today in Langhorne on HB 1369, a proposal that its sponsors portray as a ban on strikes by public school employees, but which in reality is yet another attack on educators and an attempt to silence teachers on issues directly related to the education of Pennsylvania’s children.

PHILADELPHIA—HB 1369 is a solution in search of a problem. There are more than 500 school districts in Pennsylvania, but strikes are very rare—only one in the last year involving AFT members.

When you wade through the bill’s language, it quickly becomes apparent that the main effect of this legislation would be to penalize teachers and silence their voices. While its sponsors say it is about strikes, the bill would limit collective bargaining by school employees on subjects such as standards and programs that help determine the quality of education provided to Pennsylvania’s children.

These changes would remove the professional voice of teachers from discussions about policies and practices that affect their ability to meet student needs.

This bill comes from the Education Committee, but it is not about education. That is clear from the criteria it sets out for recommendations emerging from the fact-finding and arbitration process. Conspicuously missing from those criteria is any mention of the impact those recommendations would have on the quality of education provided to students.

Finally, this legislation would impose one-sided penalties for violations of its ban on strikes and lockouts. It would penalize teachers personally—imposing thousands of dollars in fines against individual educators and threatening them with termination. But school board members who fail to bargain in good faith or who allow illegal actions against teachers would face no penalties whatever.

In these times of budget cuts and a battered economy, we should be figuring out ways to come together to find solutions for Pennsylvania students, rather than taking steps that deepen divisions—as this bill does.

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