

Sectoral bargaining FAQ

Collective bargaining, sectoral wage and standards boards, and worker power

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A note about terminology

Topics covered in this FAQ often involve specialized uses of language, reflecting both legally defined concepts and/or “terms of art” typically used by practitioners. For definitions of key terms, check out the glossary at the end of this report.

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What is sectoral bargaining?

Sectoral bargaining is a form of collective bargaining in which one or more unions bargains with multiple employers to reach a legally binding agreement on common standards that then apply to all workplaces across a particular industry, sector, or region.

Sectoral bargaining has not traditionally been part of labor law frameworks in the U.S., but it is not a new concept and has historically been an effective model for setting wages and standards in various sectors across many European countries. The sectoral approach to collective bargaining offers a different approach from the traditional U.S. “firm/enterprise level” model of bargaining in which unionized workers in a single workplace bargain with their employer to set wages and working conditions.

What conditions are motivating growing interest in sectoral bargaining in the U.S.?

In recent years, interest has grown in the question of whether sectoral bargaining or sectoral approaches to setting wages and other standards might enable U.S. workers to combat declining union density and rebuild bargaining power necessary to raise wages and improve conditions across what has become a highly unequal economy. Calls for expanding sectoral strategies are typically motivated by recognition of two closely related trends:

- Growing numbers of workers who wish they had a union contract are facing obstacles to forming or joining a union under existing weak and outdated labor laws.
- Growing numbers of workers are experiencing low wages and poor working conditions in industries in which it is especially difficult to unionize—for example because they lack employee status, are highly dispersed and isolated, work for a franchise, are hired via temp or staffing agencies, or perform “gig work” assigned via a digital app.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA or Act)—the primary federal law establishing union rights in the private sector—has as its premise a lofty and admirable goal: “encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining” between workers and their employers. Since the Act’s passage in 1935, millions of workers have won higher pay, better health care and retirement benefits, stronger health and safety protections on the job, and other important improvements through forming unions and using their collective strength to bargain with their employers. Historically, strong unions have helped ensure that income growth is distributed broadly and not just to the wealthiest households.

But the NLRA has been significantly weakened since its passage through a series of congressional and court actions, and today’s **broken federal labor law** is failing to live up to the NLRA’s originally stated goal. For example, data show a growing mismatch between

the **millions of workers who say they want a union** and the relatively small number of workers who actually have one. Union membership in the U.S. **ticked up slightly in 2025**, breaking a decades-long trend of declining unionization. But today's unionization rate of 11.2% is less than a third of what it was in the 1950s when union strength delivered broadly shared prosperity and a thriving middle class, and lower than in 1935 when the NLRA was first enacted.

One of the **consequences of this decline** in union strength in the U.S. is a corresponding decline in the ability of unions in a particular sector or industry to set broad wage and benefit standards covering a large percentage of workers in that sector or industry. When unions were stronger, they were able to align the structure of collective bargaining with the corporate structure in their industry and negotiate agreements with large employers that established wage standards for an entire industry. Union contracts established wages for unionized workers, and nonunion employers raised wages to stay competitive. In this manner, unions helped raise wages for all workers, both union and nonunion.

What does existing U.S. labor law say about sectoral bargaining? What kinds of sectoral bargaining are already possible under current labor laws?

U.S. labor law places some obstacles in front of workers and unions seeking to bargain broadly with multiple employers in their industry. Specifically, the National Labor Relations Act has long been interpreted as establishing a single worksite and a single employer as the default unit for bargaining. Workers and unions can try to win a broader bargaining unit, such as a multifacility bargaining unit of the same employer, but to do so, they need to persuade the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) of the appropriateness of the larger unit and organize support from a majority of employees in the bigger unit.

Likewise, under current law workers and unions can propose but cannot insist that employers in their industry bargain together on a multiemployer basis with the union or a group of unions. Basically, workers and unions are limited in taking this multiemployer approach, even though when achievable, it enables coordinated bargaining within a sector or industry and prevents employers from pitting workers and unions at different locations against one another.

Still, even within constraints posed by existing U.S. labor law, there are many examples (both historical and contemporary) of unions using collective power to win and maintain bargaining agreements that cover workers beyond an individual workplace. Unions have achieved this through national agreements, through multiemployer bargaining, and through campaigns that use both policy changes and bargaining power to set standards

for workers beyond those directly covered by a contract. **Examples of these successes** include union contracts that cover grocery workers across all major grocery chains in some regions, and the long-standing practice in the construction trades of multiple unions bargaining national, regional or local multiemployer master agreements with employer associations.

Recent contract settlements illustrate potential for successful multiemployer bargaining to raise industry standards

In July 2025, members of several locals of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union ratified **new agreements covering 45,000 grocery workers** in Southern California who work for Ralphs, Albertsons, Vons, and Pavilions. The agreement included significant wage increases, improvements in pensions and health care, new language on staffing requirements, and more.

In April 2026, members of Machinists (IAM) Local 701 ratified a **new collective bargaining agreement** with the Chicago Automobile Dealers Association. The agreement covers auto mechanics at more than 150 locations in and around Chicago and both dealers in the employer association and dealers who agree to the contract through a “me too” agreement.

In May 2026, the Hotel and Gaming Trades Council reached a **new eight-year agreement** with the Hotel Association of New York that provided record wage increases, maintained free health care, and improved pensions and job security, among many other gains. The agreement covers nearly 30,000 workers and 250 hotels.

In June 2026, members of Service Employees International Union 32BJ ratified a **new agreement** with the New York Realty Advisory Board that raised wages, preserved health benefits, improved pension benefits, and more. The agreement covers 34,000 doormen, porters, and other workers at more than 3,500 condominiums, co-ops, and apartment buildings in New York City.

What policy changes would be necessary to achieve wide-scale, comprehensive sectoral bargaining in the U.S.?

Engaging employers and unions in comprehensive sectoral bargaining to set standards covering major industries across the U.S. would require federal legislative reform because the National Labor Relations Act, as currently interpreted, is too narrow and restrictive to facilitate sectoral bargaining.

More modest changes to federal law could empower workers and unions to designate larger, multiemployer bargaining units for the purposes of collective bargaining, unless the employer can demonstrate a compelling reason why a broader unit is not workable. This would enable larger groups of workers and unions to pursue more sectoral approaches to bargaining in their industries.

Even without major federal labor law reform, promising intermediate pathways to raising sectoral standards could include union-strategic organizing initiatives to increase union density in key industries and geographies. Many unions—even within the constraints of existing labor laws—have successfully used combinations of collective bargaining, organizing, and policy power to raise standards for groups of workers far beyond those they directly represent (see examples above). Under existing labor laws, unions can build toward forms of sectoral bargaining through organizing critical masses of workers in a particular industry or region, pursuing multiemployer collective bargaining agreements, and/or pursuing policy changes that effectively extend the wages and benefits unionized workers have won to other employers across an industry or region.

In addition, state and local governments have some limited legal authority to enact sectoral bargaining policies for workers who currently lack employee status under the National Labor Relations Act. Examples of such policies include state sectoral bargaining frameworks recently enacted to cover rideshare drivers in Massachusetts (2024) and California (2026) and similar legislation awaiting the governor's signature in Illinois (see **Appendix Table 1** for details on these policies). State and local governments also have broad latitude to pursue sectoral standard setting via wage/standards boards that, if well designed, can engage unions representing workers in key industries in the standard-setting process (see **Appendix Table 2** for details on these state and local policies).

Other policy approaches to strengthening sectoral standards include **expanding prevailing wage laws** that apply to all employers receiving public contracts to perform work in a given industry or enacting **sectoral minimum wage policies** that raise the wage floor in a given industry.

What's the difference between sectoral bargaining and a sectoral wage board or standards board?

Sectoral bargaining involves negotiations between one or more unions and a group of employers in a particular sector or industry to establish wages, benefits, and other working standards in the sector or industry. Beyond setting guidelines for the process, the government is typically not involved directly in the bargaining, though government may play a role in approving or implementing resulting agreements.

In contrast, the government is heavily involved in sectoral wage boards or standards boards. Historically, wage boards in the U.S. context have typically brought together representatives of workers and employers to make recommendations to a government agency or legislative body on wages and other standards for their particular industry. Policymakers then consider the recommendations and potentially adopt them as standards that apply to all employers in the particular sector or industry. In some cases, wage/standards boards have authority to set certain standards more directly.

Unlike sectoral bargaining, wage boards have an established federal policy history in the U.S. For example, following the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1938, the federal government established several “industry committees,” focused primarily on low-wage sectors like garment and textile manufacturing. For a short period these **industry committees helped raise wage floors** in many low-wage sectors (thereby improving conditions for union organizing among some groups of workers), until they were disbanded in the late 1940s as part of a political compromise to secure a federal minimum wage increase.

As detailed in **Appendix Table 2**, examples of new sectoral wage or standards boards created by state or local governments in the past decade reflect highly variable policy designs, but government roles are central in each of them. Because government plays such a key role in the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of sectoral standards developed by wage boards, this process is sometimes referred to as **sectoral co-regulation**, to more clearly distinguish it from traditional collective bargaining, which is a private negotiation process between employers and unions.

What roles do unions play in sectoral bargaining versus wage boards/standards boards?

Sectoral bargaining is a form of collective bargaining. In sectoral bargaining, a union (or unions) representing workers from a given sector is at the bargaining table negotiating directly with a group of employers, and agreements reached by the parties cover all employers in the sector or industry. The sectoral agreement sets a uniform “floor” for standards across the industry, and the union then supplements these sectoral agreements via negotiations at the local workplace level in locations where workers are unionized. Unionized workers are directly represented in the bargaining process (at the sectoral and the local levels) and have the opportunity to shape bargaining priorities and outcomes via participation in the union’s internal democratic decision-making processes.

Union roles in sectoral co-regulation (by means of participation in a wage or workforce standards board) can vary, depending on how a particular board is designed, the political context in which a board operates, and the degree to which particular unions take initiative to engage with the board process and/or engage members in providing input to any union representatives serving on the board.

For example, one version of this process might be that a union representative appointed to a wage board (alongside other board members representing employers and government) takes part in the process of analyzing and recommending wage standards that the board then submits to a government agency for final review, approval, and implementation. Unlike the process of collective bargaining, union members are typically not directly involved in deciding who represents workers on a wage board or in approving the standards a wage board recommends.

Union representation on a wage board may be required as a matter of policy or left to the discretion of those with authority to appoint board members. In most cases, wage board members are appointed by a government official—typically a governor, a legislative leader, or labor agency leader—meaning the appointments are part of a political process and can change based on changes in elected or agency leadership. Wage boards generally specify a certain number of seats for worker and/or union representatives, and in most cases, some but not all unions in a sector or industry are represented on a given board. See **Appendix Table 2** for recent examples of how state or local sectoral standards boards have been structured.

Does sectoral bargaining lead to increased union membership and more worker power?

Where achievable, strong sectoral bargaining systems have some clear advantages over enterprise-level bargaining in rebalancing labor market power and potentially creating more favorable economic conditions for worker organizing. Sectoral agreements that set wages and workplace standards across an entire industry can curb the ability of individual employers to pit workers (as well as state and local governments) against each other in a race to the bottom on wages and standards. By removing wages and basic standards from competition, sectoral bargaining can in turn reduce anti-union hostility of employers who are otherwise inclined to take extreme steps to prevent workers from unionizing in order to suppress wages and benefits.

On other dimensions of worker power—including the ability of unions to build membership, engage workers in addressing concerns particular to their own workplaces, and maintain strong worker-led organizations capable of enforcing negotiated standards on the ground—firm/enterprise models of bargaining may have distinct advantages. Because negotiated sectoral standards apply whether or not a worker in the sector is a member of a union, under a sectoral agreement, large majorities of workers are likely to gain the financial benefits of coverage without contributing financially to the union and without opportunities to participate in union decision-making or organizing in their own workplace.

Because sectoral and enterprise/workplace approaches to collective bargaining differ in scope and scale and produce different (highly complementary) economic and institutional benefits, an ideal labor-policy framework would include mechanisms to facilitate both.

Significant worker organizing is likely a precondition for large-scale forms of sectoral bargaining to emerge as a successful policy option in the U.S. Sectoral bargaining requires the presence of a representative union to engage in the bargaining process with employers. Successful sectoral bargaining models require that unions possess and maintain some degree of political power, rooted in the ability to organize and represent a significant base of workers. When unions are unable to sustain organizational power and political influence, gains won via sectoral strategies can quickly be lost, and sectoral bargaining systems themselves can become fragile.

Does sectoral standard-setting via wage boards or standards boards lead to increased union membership and more worker power?

There is no inherently direct relationship between wage boards/standards boards and unions or the unionization process. So, the answer to this question depends on many factors, including how boards are designed, how much strength unions already have (or are able to build) in a particular sector or region, and how much capacity unions have to engage with a sectoral board and leverage new standards as part of union organizing initiatives (which are carried out independently outside of the board process). Available examples further illustrate that details of board design are critical to determining outcomes, including the degree to which effective sectoral standard-setting occurs, the degree to which unions are engaged in the standard-setting process, and whether the presence of sectoral standards can help decrease obstacles to union organizing.

While there is no automatic connection between establishment of a standards board and increased unionization, examples also suggest that well-designed standards boards can help create more favorable conditions for union organizing. The process of creating and participating in a wage/standards board can present opportunities for unions to increase communication with and the involvement of both existing members and nonunion workers in the affected sector who may be interested in unionizing. Likewise, in cases in which a board has authority to set and enforce a strong legally binding “floor” for wages and conditions across an industry, these standards can help decrease the incentive for low-road employers to engage in intense anti-union tactics to block worker organizing, since such employers can no longer maintain a competitive advantage based primarily on their ability to suppress wages and benefits. Unions’ roles in winning better wages and standards won via participation in an effective sectoral wage/standards board can in turn be publicized to nonunion workers and leveraged in union-organizing campaigns.

Whether a particular wage/standards board can achieve effective sectoral standard setting and contribute in this way to rebalancing labor market power depends on the **details of its design** and the engagement of strong unions in the standard-setting process. Newly established state and local boards reflect a wide array of approaches to policy design (see **Appendix Table 2** for examples), including variations in how workers or unions are represented on boards and the scope of each board’s authority. For example, **early evidence suggests** that some new state boards, like Minnesota’s Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board, are achieving greater effectiveness due to certain policy design elements, such as an ability to hire dedicated staff, a clear process for state adoption of new standards, and mechanisms for worker-led enforcement of new standards (such as “know your rights” training).

Based on available state and local examples, factors most associated with a standards board leading to increased union density likely include:

- strong policy design that requires union representation on the board and gives the board clear authority and necessary resources to set, implement, and enforce standards
- presence of already strong unions, capable of effectively representing worker interests on the board and ensuring that the board carries out its intended mission
- the presence of strong unions in the industry with significant organizing capacity and commitment to a strategic organizing program focused on unionizing more workers in the industry

How is sectoral bargaining approached under new state laws covering rideshare drivers?

So far, the only sectoral bargaining policies in place in the U.S. are recently enacted state laws covering rideshare drivers in Massachusetts (2024) and California (2026). A similar law passed by the Illinois legislature is, as of publication, awaiting the governor's signature. These laws create a state-administered system for facilitating sectoral bargaining between rideshare companies and a designated bargaining representative (union) for a single bargaining unit that includes all rideshare drivers in the state. The three new laws have some variations, but all include the following key features:

- requirements for all rideshare companies (Uber, Lyft, etc.) to regularly submit lists of drivers and their contact information to the state
- process for a certain threshold of rideshare drivers (5%–10%, depending on the policy) to indicate interest (i.e., by signing union cards) in having a particular organization (union) serve as a designated bargaining representative, thereby obligating the state to share driver contact lists with the union
- process for a certain threshold of drivers (25%–50%, depending on the policy) to petition (i.e., by signing union cards) the state for certification of their union, thereby obligating rideshare companies to then collectively bargain with the certified union
- rules and procedures for parties to follow in negotiations, including requirements for parties to submit negotiated agreements to the state for approval; if approved, the terms of the negotiated agreement then apply to all drivers in the state and to any company engaging rideshare drivers in the state

These laws are too new to have been fully tested, and the California and Illinois laws have not yet taken effect. In Massachusetts, the App Drivers Union (SEIU 34BJ/IAM) was certified as the exclusive union for all rideshare drivers in the state in May 2026, obligating rideshare companies to begin bargaining. See **Appendix Table 1** for additional details on new state rideshare collective bargaining laws.

State policies on sectoral bargaining for rideshare drivers

State policy	Estimated size of statewide bargaining unit	Threshold for showing of interest and access to driver list	Threshold for certification of union as statewide bargaining representative	Scope of bargaining	Bargaining process and timelines	Contract ratification and approval	Fees collected from companies to support system
Massachusetts Rideshare Driver Unionization	70,000	Cards signed by 5% of drivers	Cards signed by 25% of drivers (or majority vote in certification election)	Wages, benefits, hours, and conditions of work	Parties can request mediation (after 180 days) and then binding arbitration (30 days later) to ensure a contract agreement.	Contract agreements must be ratified by majority vote of drivers and then submitted to state for approval by Secretary of Labor.	No statutory language; could be subject to negotiation
California AB 1340	800,000	Cards signed by 10% of drivers	Cards signed by 50% of drivers (or majority vote in certification election)	Earnings, benefits, and other terms and conditions of work, including deactivations	Parties can request mediation (after 210 days) and then binding arbitration (75 days later) to ensure a timely contract agreement.	Process for contract ratification is left up to union; ratified agreements must be submitted to state for approval by state labor board.	Contract agreements submitted to state for approval must include language on "contributions or fees for a separate fund for the administration of benefits and services to TNC drivers including for TNC driver representation in deactivation appeals and other related activities."
Illinois Transportation Network Driver Labor Relations Act	100,000	Cards signed by 10% of drivers	Cards signed by 30% of drivers (or majority vote in certification election)	Compensation, benefits, and other terms and conditions of work, including, but not limited to, deactivations, deactivation notice and process standards, dispute resolution procedures for resolving claims alleging unjust deactivation, and earnings transparency.	Parties can request mediation (after 210 days) and then binding arbitration (60 days later) to ensure a timely contract agreement.	Contract agreements must be ratified by majority vote of drivers and then submitted to state for approval by state labor board.	4-cent/ride surcharge collected by state to administer statute + 16-cent/ride surcharge collected by state and disbursed to designated bargaining representative (union) for use in educating drivers about rights and enforcing contract and standards.

Source: Authors' analysis of state rideshare sectoral bargaining laws.

What state or local governments maintain wage boards or standards boards, and how are unions involved in these structures?

A few states have maintained laws allowing for industry-specific wage boards since the early 20th century, and these statutes have attracted renewed interest in recent years. For example, in 2015 the New York Labor Commissioner used their authority under the state's long-standing [wage board statute](#) to convene a [wage board for the fast food industry](#), resulting in a new \$15 minimum wage covering fast food workers statewide.

The state of California operated a sectoral wage and standards board for decades through its [Industrial Welfare Commission](#) (IWC, established in 1913), until the commission was [defunded by the legislature in 2004](#) over concerns that it was being used by employer interests to undermine updated state wage and hour laws. The IWC was briefly revived with a new infusion of state funding in 2024 and issued [new wage orders covering several sectors in 2025](#). When in operation, the IWC consists of a five-member board, including two labor representatives, two employer representatives, and one public representative (all appointed by the governor). The IWC has authority to issue orders governing wages, hours, and working conditions and must prioritize consideration of industries in which more than 10% of the workforce is at or below the federal poverty level.

In the past decade, renewed interest in sectoral standard setting has sparked additional state and local policy experimentation with wage and standards boards. New policies in a dozen state or local jurisdictions present a range of models for board structures that include some form of representation from workers (or unions), employers, and government officials who are tasked with studying, recommending, or in rare cases, directly setting wages and standards that affect conditions of workers in specified low-wage sectors.

Formal roles for unions in recently created state or local standards boards vary, as do the levels of authority each board has to recommend or set standards. Many boards were created with [direct input from unions](#) or emerged as legislative proposals in contexts in which unions were [already organizing affected workers](#). New state and local experiments to date suggest that wage and standards boards are most likely to help increase worker power when boards have clear authority to set standards and where unions are actively organizing in the affected sector as new standards are issued. Implementation challenges faced by some new boards, such as [California's fast food council](#), also illustrate that strong commitment from government leaders is a necessary condition for a wage or standards board to function effectively, especially in the face of heavy industry opposition.

For more details on these policies, see **Appendix Table 2**. Additionally, legislation has been introduced to create new standards boards for [nail salon workers in New York](#) and [long-term care workers](#) in Oregon; Oregon also passed legislation in 2025 to study conditions of [farmworkers](#), as a step toward considering a farmworker standards board.

Appendix
Table 2

Recently created state and local wage or standar boards, in order of enactment date

State or local policy	Year enacted	End date (if specified)	Makeup of board	Scope of board authority	Notable outcomes
City of Seattle (WA) Domestic Workers	2018		13-member board, including four domestic workers or worker organization representatives, two domestic workers who are not worker organization representatives, four hiring entities or their representatives, two individuals who contract with or hire domestic workers, and one community representative; mayor and city council each appoint six members (city council must approve mayor's appointments), and board appoints remaining member.	Consider, analyze, and make recommendations to City on legal protections, benefits, and working conditions for domestic worker industry standards	
New York Farm Laborers Wage Board	2019	2022	Three-person board, including one representative of farm bureau, one representative of state AFL-CIO, and one representative appointed by state Labor Commissioner	Receive testimony and recommend whether and how to reduce minimum number of hours a farmworker must work per week before receiving overtime pay	Board's 2022 recommendations were adopted by state in 2023, starting 10-year phase in to lower the current 60-hour threshold for farmworker overtime pay to 40 hours per week by January 1, 2032
City of Philadelphia Domestic Workers Standards and Implementation Task Force	2019		Nine-person board, including chair of City Council Committee on Law and Government, representatives from Councilwoman Sánchez' Office, Mayor's Office of Labor, Domestic Workers Alliance, and Community Legal Services, plus remaining members representing domestic workers and domestic worker employers (recommended by mayor and appointed by city council)	Consider, analyze, and make recommendations to City Council Committee of Law and Government and Mayor's Office of Labor regarding legal protections, benefits, and working conditions for domestic workers.	
Colorado Agricultural Work Advisory Committee	2021	2031	Nine-member board, including two agricultural workers and two workers' rights advocates (appointed by Director of Dept. of Labor and Employment), plus three representatives of agriculture employers and two from Migrant Farm Worker Division of CO Legal Services (appointed by Commissioner of Agriculture)	Gather and analyze data and information regarding wages and working conditions of agricultural workers; report findings and any legislative recommendations to general assembly	
City of Detroit Industry Standards Board ordinance	2021		Once triggered (by petition from at least 150 workers in a given industry), ordinance requires creation of nine-person board including three employees or employee representatives (one appointed by mayor and two by city council), three members from management or employer associations (one appointed by mayor and two by city council), one appointee from mayor's office, one appointee from city council, and one member from public at large (appointed by city council)	Boards established for a particular industry have authority to conduct outreach, investigate local working conditions, and report recommendations to City Council.	The first board created under the ordinance for Sports Arena Workers issued its recommendations to the council in November, 2025.
Michigan Nursing Home Workforce Stabilization Council	2021	2023	Nursing home workers, employers, and residents, along with members of government.	Review existing policy and offer recommendations for legislation and administrative action for increasing nursing home staffing, improving career development, and raising standards.	
Nevada Home Care Employment Standards Board	2021	2022	10-person board chaired by Health and Human Services Director; voting members include state Labor Commissioner plus nine members appointed by HHS Director: three representatives of home care employers; three representatives of home care employees; and three persons who receive or represent persons who receive home care services	Review, investigate, and make recommendations to state Dept of Health and Human Services for improvement of working conditions in home care industry	Board recommendations in 2022 helped pave way for 2023 legislation setting \$16 min wage for home care workers and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates.

**Appendix
Table 2
(cont.)**

Harris County (TX) Essential Workers Board	2021		13-member board of "low-in-come essential workers from Harris County," including at least one worker from each of the following sectors: Airport or Transportation; Construction; Domestic Work or Home Care; Education or Childcare; Grocery, Convenience, or Drug Store; Healthcare or Public Health; Janitorial; Food Services, Hospitality or Leisure Services; Retail. Five initial members appointed by Commissioners Court then recommend appointments for remaining eight board members	Provide feedback and recommendations to Dept of Economic Equity and Opportunity and other appropriate County departments on programs and policies that recognize and support Essential Workers; board may also serve in advisory capacity to Commissioners Court on such programs and policies	
California Fast Food Council	2023	2029	Nine-member board ("council") including two representatives of fast-food industry, two representatives of franchisees/owners, two representatives of fast-food employees, one unaffiliated member of the public (all appointed by the Governor) plus two representatives for advocates of fast-food employees (appointed by Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Committee on Rules).	Increase fast food wages by annualized CPI-W or 3.5%, whichever is lower, and develop other minimum fast food employment standards on working conditions and training; for standards that fall under the jurisdiction of OSHA or the Civil Rights Council, the council must petition these agencies to consider adopting recommended standards.	Council has not yet used authority to set new wage rates beyond the \$20/hr fast food min wage established by statute and has not met since chair resigned in June, 2025 (as of publication the governor had not appointed a new council chair)
Colorado Direct Care Workforce Stabilization Board	2023	2029	15-member board including four members representing direct care employers or employer organizations; four representing direct care workers or worker organizations; four representing direct care consumers (all appointed by director of Dept. of Labor, with at least one in each category from a rural or frontier area), and three representing state government (one each from Dept. of Labor, Dept. of Health Care Policy, and Dept. of Public Health)	Develop and deliver recommendations to legislature for direct care employment standards every two years, starting in 2024; areas recommendations must address include wages and benefits, Medicaid reimbursement rates, working conditions, exploration of other industry models, and impacts of racial and economic injustice	2024 board recommendations laid groundwork for 2025 legislation including min wage of \$17 for direct care workers (board recommendation was \$25/hr by 2026) and new "know your rights" training requirements
Minnesota Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board	2023		Nine-member board, including commissioners of state Dept of Labor, Dept of Health, and Dept of Human Services, plus six members appointed by governor: three representing nursing home workers or worker organizations and three representing nursing home employers or employer organizations	Investigate workforce challenges, discuss solutions, and enact regulations that "protect the health and welfare of nursing home workers." Board must adopt rules every two years starting in 2024, has rulemaking authority for broad set of compensation-related matters, and can issue recommendations on safety. Board also charged with setting requirements for workforce-wide "know your rights" training on new standards, to be delivered by "certified worker organizations" selected by board	First set of rules issued by board in 2024 included 1.5x pay for designated holidays, min wage of \$19 in 2026 and \$20.50 in 2027 (pending federal approval), and one hour of required "know your rights" training every two years.
Washington Child Care Workforce Standards Board	2026		10-member board appointed by governor, including three members representing child care workers (one from "largest org representing family child care providers," one from "largest org representing child care center workers," and one representing "workers in school-age programs"); three representing employers; one representing professional development programs; one representing parents; plus secretary of Dept. of Children, Youth, and Families, and director of Dept of Labor	Make recommendations to director of state labor agency on wages and working conditions for child care workers	

Source: EPI analysis of state and local wage and workforce standards boards.

Glossary of key terms

Bargaining unit: The defined group of workers who are included (represented by a single union or bargaining representative) in the collective bargaining process and covered by any resulting contract agreements with an employer. If a union and employer do not agree on who should be included in a particular bargaining unit, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) determines the composition of the unit. A bargaining unit may include all or some of the workers in a given workplace; it can be very small and narrowly defined, or very broad, depending on what a group of unionizing workers prefers, what the employer will agree to, and whether workers can persuade the NLRB to recognize a “community of interest” among workers in the proposed bargaining unit. When workers attempt to form a new union, employers often file legal objections to workers’ preferred bargaining unit and use such disputes to delay the union representation and first-contract bargaining process.

Collective bargaining and collective bargaining agreement: Collective bargaining is a process by which a group of workers, through a designated bargaining representative(s), such as a union, negotiates with their employer(s) over wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment. Though not required under U.S. labor law, collective bargaining can involve more than one union, and it can involve more than one employer, if the parties involved agree to this arrangement. Collective bargaining is a private process between the parties (although sometimes a federal or private mediator will be involved in assisting the parties in reaching an agreement). Agreements reached by the parties through their negotiations are memorialized in a “collective bargaining agreement,” which is a formal, legally binding contract between the parties.

Enterprise bargaining: Collective bargaining between workers, through their designated representative (union) and their employer, covering workers at a single facility. Enterprise bargaining is the default approach to bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act.

Multiemployer bargaining: Collective bargaining between one or more unions and a group of employers (typically operating through an employer association for their industry or a designated employer representative). Agreements reached by the parties in bargaining apply to all employers who have agreed to the multiemployer arrangement, but not to other employers (although they can agree later to be added to the agreement). Multiemployer bargaining is a voluntary arrangement—workers and unions cannot force an employer to bargain in this manner, as the NLRA does not legally require it. Multiemployer bargaining is, however, possible under current labor law and already commonplace in industries like construction, entertainment, and professional sports. Multiemployer bargaining can take place at the national, regional, or local level, depending on the structure of a particular industry and the preferences of the parties.

National agreement or master agreement: Unions and larger employers sometimes bargain a national agreement (sometimes referred to as a “master agreement”) that covers

all unionized facilities of the employer, resulting in a collective bargaining agreement broader than the typical enterprise-level agreement. National agreements are effective at establishing uniform wage and benefit standards across an employer's operations. These agreements are often supplemented at the local level by local agreements addressing particular issues at that location. Examples would include contracts negotiated between the United Auto Workers union and each of the "Big Three" automakers (Ford, GM, and Stellantis), between the Teamsters union and UPS, or between postal unions and the U.S. Postal Service.

Prevailing wage laws: Prevailing wage laws set a uniform minimum wage that employers must pay to workers on a project. Typically, prevailing wage laws apply to employers on government-funded projects to ensure that public investments support the creation of good jobs and do not drive down wages in the industry. Prevailing wage laws exist at the federal, state, and local levels and are a well-established means of setting strong wage standards across an industry that cover both unionized and nonunion workers.

Sectoral bargaining: Collective bargaining between one or more unions and a representative group of employers in a sector or industry to set wage and benefit standards for the sector or industry. Agreements reached by the parties apply to all employers in the sector or industry. There is currently no mechanism for sectoral bargaining in the National Labor Relations Act, but it is common in many European countries.

Sectoral co-regulation: Regulatory systems, such as wage boards or workforce standards boards, designed to facilitate setting of labor standards at the sectoral level with the participation of worker representatives and employers alongside public officials.

Tripartite: Tripartite refers to a process through which representatives of three parties—workers, employers, and the government—work to address an issue. Tripartite processes are a common feature of labor relations in many European countries. With the exception of a few state and local wage or standards boards, tripartite processes are rare in the U.S., and there is no formal mechanism for them to operate in the labor relations system under U.S. labor law.

Wage board or standards board: Wage boards (sometimes also called worker(s) boards, labor standards boards, industry standards boards, industry councils, or workforce standards boards) are established by legislative or executive branch action in order to study, recommend, and/or set minimum standards for wages (and sometimes other working conditions) in a particular industry. Typically, such boards have a "tripartite" structure, meaning they include representatives of workers, employers, and government agencies as participating members. The structural design and effectiveness of such boards, including the degree of authority they have to set or implement standards, can vary widely (see **Appendix Table 2** above for examples). Standard setting via a wage board process differs from traditional collective bargaining in that the government is

involved in appointing members of the board and in approving and implementing any board recommendations on standards (unlike collective bargaining, which is a private process between unions and employers). Any standards resulting from a wage board process apply to all employers in the industry, whereas agreements reached through traditional collective bargaining apply only to the employer(s) involved in and are covered by the collective bargaining agreement. Because wage boards are essentially a government process with participation by workers and employers, they are sometimes referred to as “sectoral co-regulation.”

Works council: A works council is a committee of elected worker representatives that advocates for workers’ interests with their employer at the workplace level. Works councils are common in the labor relations systems of many European countries as an enterprise-level complement to industry or sectoral bargaining conducted by labor unions. This labor relations structure differs from the U.S. system, and works councils are generally not allowed under U.S. labor law, which prohibits employer domination, interference, or support of labor organizations (including works councils).