DOL Reports Mixed Results for 2014: Union Membership Declines in Private Sector but Public Sector Rises

Labor & Employment Law Update

By Sara Zorich on January 27, 2015

On January 23, 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) released its 2014 Union Membership Annual Report. Most notably was a decrease in union membership overall by .2%. The private sector union rates fell from 7.5% to 7.4% between 2013 and 2014 while the public sector rose from 38.7% to 39.2%.

The DOL report indicated that in 2014, 7.2 million employees in the public sector were members of a union compared to 7.4 million workers in the private sector. However, public sector workers have a much higher percentage of union membership – 35.7% for the public sector vs. 6.6% for the private sector. In the private sector, industries with the highest rate of unionized workforces continue to include utilities (22.3%), transportation and warehousing (19.6%), telecommunication (14.8%) and construction (13.9%).

In Illinois, union membership rates fell by .7% in 2014. In 2013, 15.8% of the workforce in Illinois were members of a union compared to 15.1% in 2014.

The report also noted that men had a higher union membership rate at 11.7% vs. women at 10.5%. Though it was reported that the gap between union membership for men and women has narrowed significantly in the past 30 years when the gap was approximately 10.1%. Additionally, the union membership rates for older workers were the highest with workers age 55 to 64 representing 14.1% of the union membership however this was a decrease from 14.3% in 2013. The union membership rates for younger employees (age 16 – 24 years) grew from 4.2% to 4.5% showing that even though the youngest age group has maintained the smallest union rate percentage, it is on the rise.

A copy of the Labor Department report may be found here.

Despite the DOL's report, organized labor is ramping up efforts to organize non-union workers across all industries and across socio-economic lines (including clerical and white-collar).

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