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ABC Massachusetts won't stop fighting discriminatory Springfield project labor agreement

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Joe Camilo

Last month I reported that the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission had withstood an all-out push from construction unions and their political allies and put its \$350 million West Parish Water Treatment Plant project out to bid without a union-only project labor agreement (PLA). Sadly, the victory was fleeting. On March 18 the Commission added a PLA to the project via an addendum.

The about-face came after U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey put out a statement calling for a PLA on the project. Pre-qualified open-shop contractors – several of them ABC MA members – had already expended resources developing bids for the project.

Commission chair Vanessa Otero wrote in the Springfield Republican that the biggest reason why she supported the PLA was poverty, and because “union membership changes the trajectory of lives.”

The reality is that it changes the trajectory of some lives. That doesn’t include the vast majority of minority contractors in Massachusetts, who choose to be open-shop. In fact, there are so few minority construction workers who belong to unions in Massachusetts that the Water and Sewer Commission PLA includes a special carve out to allow more minority participation.

PLA’s also negatively affect the life trajectories of the more than 80% of the Massachusetts construction workforce that chooses not to affiliate with a union. They lose out on the opportunity to participate in local jobs funded with their own tax dollars.

Chapter president Greg Beeman has already sent multiple letters to the commission making the case for free and open competition rather than a union-only PLA. He also had a commentary on the topic published in the Republican. We are currently determining the best course for moving forward. But rest assured, ABC MA will continue to fight for our members and against this discriminatory project labor agreement.

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