

Before the House Committee on Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Health,  
Employment, Labor, and Pensions  
“Ensuring Union Leaders Represent Members, Not Agendas”

**December 17, 2025**

My name is Michael Alcorn, and I’ve been a crew member at Trader Joe’s for eleven years. First at stores in Newton and Hadley, Massachusetts, and now in Michigan. I am also a visiting fellow at the Institute for the American Worker. I appreciate the opportunity to testify about my experience with Trader Joe’s United and to share why I believe greater transparency and accountability within unions is essential to protecting workers’ rights.

My testimony today is about my experience at the store in Hadley, Massachusetts. When the campaign to unionize my store began eight years into my tenure, I had no prior experience with unions. Like many Americans, I assumed they were democratic, open organizations built to empower workers. Unfortunately, what I experienced during and after the campaign was the opposite: secrecy, misinformation, exclusion, and intimidation. These experiences convinced me that union transparency is vitally important to empower Americans and ensure we truly have a voice in decisions that affect our livelihoods and families.

I first heard about the effort to unionize our store from a co-worker who told it to me in confidence, warning that people could get fired if management found out. That secrecy was intimidating and unusual because our store had always been an open, communicative place.

When I said I didn’t think we needed a union but was willing to learn more, the organizer told me that all “we” need to initiate a union election was for 30% of the store to say they’d be willing to have a union election, and that later we would further discuss with our co-workers whether we wanted to form a union. That was not true. In reality, we were intentionally misled and those signatures on authorization cards were for supporting unionization itself.

Workers should be trusted and empowered to make the decisions that are best for them and their families. We should never be misled about what we are signing, especially when it could bind us to a new organization that will represent us in negotiations, collect dues, and speak on our behalf for many years to come. That is why clear disclosure standards and union transparency rules are so important. Workers deserve the same honesty and fairness that we expect from our employers.

The lack of transparency didn’t end with the organizing campaign. After filing for an election, organizers issued public statements and videos portraying our store as an abusive

workplace. Those narratives did not align with our experience. Customers were shocked and concerned, and as long-time employees, some of us felt humiliated.

When I asked a union organizer why they didn't talk to all employees before going public, I was told they "had to do it this way" to "surprise the boss." But that secrecy didn't just surprise management; it surprised us as well.

Those of us who asked questions or expressed doubts were labeled "anti-union" or accused of being company sympathizers. In a workplace that had always been friendly and collaborative, this created tension and fear. A truly democratic organization shouldn't silence dissent or shame people for asking for more information.

After the union won the election, the same lack of transparency continued. The union quickly held officer elections with limited notice. Only a small portion of employees were informed or able to participate, and several of us raised concerns that it wasn't fair. Later, I learned that one organizer admitted they intentionally didn't advertise the vote widely because they wanted to ensure the "right people" got elected.

When I contacted the U.S. Department of Labor in 2023, I was told that because Trader Joe's United was a new union, the usual oversight rules didn't apply. There were no guarantees of fairness in how officers were chosen or how the union constitution was drafted. That shocked me. How can a union claim to represent workers democratically when no one oversees its internal elections or ensures transparency in how it is governed?

In the months since then, I've seen examples of the union putting politics before people. The first instance came when the union demanded that Trader Joe's include gender-affirming care and abortion coverage in the contract. At that time though our health insurance already covered those services. Crew members with access to the union's private group chat said the goal was to provoke Trader Joe's into objecting so the union could mislead the public and criticize the company's progressive reputation.

More recently, this past July, Trader Joe's United posted on social media that it asked the company to designate all unionized stores as "sanctuary stores." Trader Joe's declined, explaining that all crew members are required to have a Social Security Number and that the company would follow the law. To me, these examples show that the union's undemocratically elected leaders, not its members, are driven by politics and trying to make Trader Joe's look bad.

That's why it's so important to return the focus to workers themselves. Every worker deserves accurate information and a fair process. Transparency matters because it protects choice and fairness. Workers should be able to make fully informed decisions

about joining or remaining in a union, and they should be able to see how their dues are spent, how leaders are chosen, and how decisions are made.

I believe Congress should strengthen disclosure requirements for all unions, new and old. Workers should have access to basic documents like union constitutions, financial reports, and election procedures before being asked to sign authorization cards or pay dues as in H.R. 6139, the *Union Members Right to Know Act*, recently introduced by Rep. Foxx.

Congress should also require secret ballot elections for union officers to prevent situations like I experienced at the store in Hadley, like H.R. 6136, the *Protecting Union Representation and Elections Act*, sponsored by Rep. Fine.

Transparency helps workers. When unions operate in the open, workers can trust that they're being represented honestly and democratically. The law should ensure that everyone has access to the facts and that no one can take advantage of confusion or fear to claim power over others.

My experience with Trader Joe's United opened my eyes to how easily the system can fail the very people it's supposed to protect. The lack of transparency, oversight, and accountability within union organizing and governance can leave workers vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation. I commend Rep. Harris for introducing H.R. 6141, the *Fair Access to Justice for Union Members Act*, that will allow workers to take serious concerns straight to court instead of waiting for months or completing the union's internal grievance process.

Workers deserve full information, fair elections, and honest representation.

Thank you for inviting me here to share my story and for considering ways to ensure every worker's voice is heard and protected. I look forward to answering your questions.