

Senate Republicans move to let 14-, 15-year-olds work later on school nights

By **Jake Zuckerman**
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COLUMBUS, Ohio – Ohio Senate Republicans have advanced a political effort to allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 9 p.m. instead of their current labor curfew of 7 p.m. on school nights.

Such a change would require federal intervention from both Congress and the Ohio General Assembly. On Tuesday, the Senate Workforce Committee put a plan in motion, voting in favor of both a [state law change](#) and a [resolution](#) urging Congress to do the same.

It has not yet been voted on by the full Senate body. The bill can come up for a full Senate vote at the discretion of Republican leadership.

The bill requires agreement from both the House and the governor. The resolution, which carries no force of law, only needs agreement from the House.

State Sen. Tim Schaffer, a Fairfield County Republican, sponsored both measures. He told lawmakers that employers in his district reported struggles finding “adequate staffing” during the pandemic and said that teenagers can develop life skills by entering the workforce gradually at a younger age.

Under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, 14- and 15-year-olds can’t work past 7 p.m. on school nights, or past 9 p.m. during the summer. They also can’t work more than three hours per weekday or 18 hours per week. Sixteen and 17-year-olds can’t work past 11 p.m. on school nights.

Schaffer’s proposal would retain the daily and weekly limits on hours worked by minors and would require them to get written permission from both their parents and their schools.

Most employers are subject to Fair Labor Standards Act rules. If there’s any conflict between state and federal law, the employer must hew to whichever one is more protective of children, according to the [Legislative Service Commission](#).

Trade associations like the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the Pickerington Chamber of Commerce testified in support of the legislation. As Tod Bowen of the Ohio Restaurant and Hospitality Alliance said to committee members, curfews on work hours for teens are appropriate, but 9 p.m. is “more reasonable,” especially given such shifts would require parental permission.

The two Democrats on the committee raised concerns about employer labor violations, and ramifications of expanded work hours on students’ academic performance.

Policy Matters Ohio, a liberal public policy advocacy, testified against the bill, which passed out of committee 4-2 along party lines. The working hours change, according to the organization’s Heather Smith, opens the door for employers skirting the three-hour work limit on weekdays.

Citing recent U.S. Department of Labor investigations, she said child labor violations have increased by 31% since 2020. For instance, an Ohio lathe mill [paid \\$22,000 in fines after a 15-year-old child “became entangled in the gears of a powered wood processing machine.”](#) Four other minors under the age of 16 were employed on site. In Cincinnati, two pizza restaurants had [21 minors under the age of 16 working manual fryers, gas ovens with an open flame, a mechanical dough puller and other hazardous work](#) generally off limits for kids their age.

By the department’s own [count](#), between 2017 and 2021 there were 4,000 violation cases involving 13,000 minor-aged workers.

“Dismantling long-settled laws designed to protect children from abuse clears the way for corporations to access and exploit children in desperate situations, instead of paying livable wages that would attract adult workers,” Smith said in a letter to lawmakers.