

March 6, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Groups Urge You to Vote NO on H.R. 985.

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

This week, the House is scheduled to vote on H.R. 985 – the “Fairness in Class Action Litigation and Furthering Asbestos Claim Transparency Act of 2017.” Title I of this bill – Fairness in Class Action Litigation – would obliterate class actions in America. The undersigned groups write in strong opposition to H.R. 985. The fact that the House would even consider such sweeping, reckless legislation without holding a single hearing is an outrage.

Like last year’s legislation (H.R. 1927), the bill begins with the requirement that every person in a class have “an injury of the same type and scope” before the case can proceed. This alone would sound the death knell for most class actions. Classes inherently include a range of affected individuals, and virtually never does every member of the class suffer the same “scope” of injury from the same wrongdoing. Certainly, many civil rights, discrimination and employment class actions, including cases involving refusals by companies to properly pay workers, would not satisfy these criteria.

But Title I of H.R. 985 adds another 10 pages of new, complicated provisions, each of which is designed to ensure that no class action could ever be brought or litigated. In some cases, it would do so by overturning centuries of American law. Some provisions would make it even more impossible to bring race and gender discrimination class actions. Other provisions would have a dramatic impact on cases against toxic polluters. The bill even goes so far as preventing someone from choosing his or her own counsel. And that’s just the beginning of what’s wrong with this appalling piece of legislation.

In addition, by considering this bill now, Congress is circumventing the process that Congress itself established for promulgation of federal court rules under the Rules Enabling Act, bypassing both the Judicial Conference of the United States and the U.S. Supreme Court. In fact, the Judicial Conference already has an Advisory Committee on Civil Rules, which is currently meeting to discuss possible changes to Rule 23. Interference with the proper federal court rules process is reckless and irresponsible, particularly when this proposal is so damaging to victims.

Class action lawsuits are among the most important tools to enable harmed, cheated and violated individuals and small businesses to hold large corporations and institutions accountable and deter future misconduct. H.R. 985 would annihilate that tool. We urge you to oppose this bill.

For more information, please contact Joanne Doroshow at the Center for Justice & Democracy, joanned@centerjd.org or Susan Harley at Public Citizen's Congress Watch, sharley@citizen.org.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women
 A New Way of Life Reentry Project
 AFL-CIO
 Alliance for Justice
 American Antitrust Institute
 American Association for Justice
 American Family Voices
 American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
 Bet Tzedek Legal Services
 Brazilian Policy Center
 California Employment Lawyers Association
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Center for Justice & Democracy
 Central Florida Jobs with Justice
 Comite Civico Del Valle
 Committee to Support the Antitrust Laws
 Communications Workers of America
 Consumer Action
 Consumer Federation of America
 Consumer Watchdog
 Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety
 Consumers Union
 D.C. Consumer Rights Coalition
 Daily Kos
 Demand Progress
 Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
 District Council 37 (NY) Municipal Employees Legal Services
 Earthjustice
 East Bay Community Law Center
 East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
 Economic Policy Institute Policy Center
 Environmental Working Group
 Essential Information
 Farmworker Association of Florida
 Food & Water Watch
 Fuse Washington
 Homeowners Against Deficient Dwellings

Impact Fund
Interfaith Alliance of Colorado
JASA Legal Services for the Elderly in Queens
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley
Louisiana Bucket Brigade
Main Street Alliance
Maryland Consumer Rights Council
MFY Legal Services, Inc.
National Association of Consumer Advocates
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low income clients)
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Consumers League
National Disability Rights Network
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
New Haven Legal Assistance Association
Oregon Environmental Council
OVEC - Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Progressive Congress Action Fund
Public Citizen
Public Counsel
Public Justice
Public Justice Center
Public Law Center
RootsAction.org
SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center
Sciencecorps
SEIU 775
SEIU 925
SEIU 1199 NW
Sierra Club
Southern Appalachia Mountain Stewards
Southern Poverty Law Center
Texas Watch
U.S. PIRG
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Federation of State Employees
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Western New York Council on Occupational Safety & Health
Woodstock Institute
Workers' Rights Center
Workplace Fairness