

Connecticut National Organization for Women



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Ensure Health Care for All by Supporting SB 462

Good afternoon. My name is Kathleen Sloan and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut NOW, the state chapter of the National Organization for Women. As an organization whose mission is to facilitate equality for women and girls, the availability of affordable health insurance is fundamental to that purpose. Women cannot hope to attain equality through employment advancement if they do not possess health insurance for themselves and their children. A woman who cannot obtain proper health care because her employer does not provide her with insurance cannot be a healthy, productive employee or parent. Furthermore, when women are paid poverty level wages so that they qualify for Medicaid and that is their only source of health insurance, everyone suffers. These women and their children suffer. The state government suffers because it is then forced to pay the costs of the employer's dereliction of duty. Ultimately, the taxpayers of Connecticut suffer because it is their taxes which must support the heavy burden placed upon the state in its status as insurer of last resort.

For these reasons, Connecticut NOW strongly urges this committee, and ultimately the entire legislature, to pass SB 462, an Act Concerning a Fair Share Health Care Surcharge. This bill would be the first step in the creation of a level playing field. A \$2.50 per hour per employee fee on retail sector employers with more than 5,000 employees if they do not provide that amount toward their employees' health insurance, begins the process of redressing this cost shift to workers. Connecticut taxpayers and small businesses subsidized Wal Mart to the tune of \$5.4 million last year alone. It is unconscionable that the world's largest, most profitable company forces the American taxpayer to foot the bill for its own rightful business expenses.

Connecticut must follow the example of Maryland which made history when it passed a bill requiring private companies like retail behemoth Wal Mart to spend at least 8% of their payroll on healthcare for employees. It is time that Connecticut legislators similarly stand up to big businesses and put the health and welfare of their constituents above corporate profits. Efforts are currently underway in 30 other states to pass such legislation, proving that the anti-business claim of some in this state is bogus.

Wal Mart employees, most of whom are women, deserve better than they have been getting from this retail giant. Since Wal Mart executives have refused to do the right thing on their own, it is the responsibility of the state, through its elected officials, to lead the way.

Fewer than half of Wal Mart's employees are able to participate in the company's health insurance plan due to eligibility restrictions and its prohibitively high cost. Consequently, Wal Mart employees have no alternative but to seek insurance coverage through the state. The main reason Wal Mart is the richest company in the world is because it pays its workers poverty-level wages, while contributing next to nothing toward their health care. It is long past time to tell Wal Mart, and any company tempted to follow its business model, that you cannot stay at the top if you're standing on the backs of the employees who make your profits possible.

Connecticut NOW works through feminist activism to protect and expand the rights and opportunities of women and girls and eliminate gender based discrimination.