

Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Keri Hoehne, I live in Torrington, and I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill Number 462, an Act Concerning Fair Share Health Care.

I am employed as an organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 371. We represent thousands of workers in retail food, and that is the group of workers that I spend much of my time trying to unionize. The workers I deal with on a daily basis are the workers who will be most affected by this bill.

Many people here today will tell you about how few people actually choose to purchase Wal-Mart health insurance, because of how unaffordable it is. I would like to tell you about one particular woman who is employed by Wal-Mart and actually is eligible to purchase the insurance. A few years ago, shortly after she was hired, she chose to purchase the health insurance for herself and her infant daughter, at a cost of \$210 every two weeks, despite the fact that she only made \$360.00 a week before taxes.

While she understood from the beginning that the insurance would not cover birth control for herself, what she did not realize when she purchased the insurance was that it also did not cover wellness visits for her daughter. So, for the first few of her daughter's doctor visits, she didn't realize that all of the immunizations and other charges were not being paid for by her insurance. Then, when she realized the bills weren't being paid, she panicked, and didn't take the baby for her next checkup until months after she was supposed to go. When she finally did try to make an appointment, the doctor insisted that she had to bring at least a little money with her to pay her back charges before he would see the baby again. Instead, she chose to switch doctors and go to another pediatrician in another town. She has since decided to enroll in HUSKY for her daughter, and the four year old can now get her regular check ups. However, it is outrageous that this full time worker must rely on state insurance to care for her daughter, while the company she works for is the richest in the world.

Wal-Mart admits that only 46% of its workers receive health insurance from the company. In addition, while everyone else's costs are skyrocketing, Wal-Mart's latest form 5500 filed with the Internal Revenue Service reveals Wal-Mart's average healthcare spending per worker actually

declined by 3.5% from 2003-2004. Wal-Mart's cuts to its average health care spending per worker is especially striking given that national health care spending per worker for the rest of corporate America rose by 7.6% between 2003 and 2004.

Wal-Mart is the biggest corporate abuser of the taxpayer-funded public healthcare system. If the problem goes unaddressed, and Wal-Mart continues its expansion plans, the Wal-Mart Health Care Crisis will infect every state in America and billions of tax dollars will be needlessly wasted while workers and their families will either go without health care or be forced to depend on a public health care system already in crisis.

While we are all currently part of a very broken system, Wal-Mart is the company that is primarily responsible taking advantage of that system. The direct cost to American taxpayers of the Wal-Mart healthcare crisis is significant and growing. Based on the states that have disclosed information, the estimated 2005 cost of providing public health care assistance to uninsured Wal-Mart workers and their dependents was nearly 1.4 billion dollars. This is projected to grow to over 9.1 billion dollars over the next 5 years, if you take into account Wal-Mart's publicly stated goal of expanding by 1,500 new stores. If lawmakers don't address this health care problem, American taxpayers will pay at least \$2.18 billion to subsidize Wal-Mart's health care coverage in 2010 alone.

What this state really needs is universal health coverage, and universal health coverage can only happen when everyone pays their fair share. This bill is a beginning, and a step in the right direction. Please support this bill and stop Wal-Mart from continuing to lower the state's standards for employee health security.