

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

My name is Brian Petronella, I reside in Norwalk, and I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill Number 462, an Act Concerning Fair Share Health Care.

I am here as the President of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 371. We represent thousands of workers in CT in many fields, including healthcare, transportation, meatpacking, and primarily retail food.

In that capacity, I am responsible for negotiating union contracts for our members with many large employers in the state, including Stop and Shop and Shaw's Supermarkets. For decades, our members have received health, dental, optical, disability, and life insurance with no weekly premium. In a state where Wal-Mart employees pay \$351.20 every two weeks for family health care coverage, the fact that our full-time members still have great family coverage for free is astounding. However, that benefit to our members is under attack. Our contract with Stop and Shop expires in less than a year, and I know that the health insurance will be the number one issue at the bargaining table.

Two years ago, when we were negotiating the current contract with Stop and Shop, we were forced to make many concessions to ensure that there would still be no weekly co-pay for our members. We were forced to give up the Sunday time and a half in exchange for a \$1.50 premium for new workers, and we also had to give up the pay scale that ensured our members would quickly acquire a living wage. However, the greatest benefit we were forced to concede was the waiting period for part time workers to receive health insurance.

Now, part time workers must wait for two (2) years before they will receive free health insurance. This means that Stop and Shop employees must risk going without insurance, or must rely on state taxpayer funded health insurance. The number one reason why Stop and Shop was so adamant to change the insurance eligibility was because they did not feel that they could compete with Wal-Mart, who was paying substantially less in health care benefits. While in my opinion, Stop and Shop is still a responsible employer, it is only because they are forced to be because of our union

contract. Make no mistake, if Stop and Shop and Shaw's could get away with acting like Wal-Mart, they would do it in a heartbeat.

I have always been proud to be a resident of Connecticut, where most of our employers are responsible, and do provide health insurance for their workers. However, Connecticut's healthcare system is broken, and with Wal-Mart as the largest employer in the country, they are driving retailers' race to the bottom. Wal-Mart is setting the trend for lower standards of living, wages, and benefits. It is the responsibility of our elected officials to step in and re-establish Connecticut residents' sense of health security. If we do not stop companies like Wal-Mart from using state health insurance as an excuse to not provide coverage to their workers, this state is no longer going to be a place I am proud to live, work, and raise a family in. I realize that we are trying to bring more businesses in to Connecticut, but I do not believe that growth should be at the expense of corporate responsibility.

As union leaders, we fight for all workers, not just those who pay dues. It is important to me that every worker in Connecticut can provide health security for their family. Retail is not a sector of the economy that can move to China or India. Retailers are going to stay here to sell to the wealthy residents of Connecticut. We will always have these jobs, and since retail is quickly becoming the largest sector of the economy, it is important to make sure these jobs are ones that can support a family. It is the responsibility of our elected officials to ensure that large retailers with staggering profits do not continue to line their pockets while taxpayers foot the bill for healthcare for their employees. This bill is a positive step toward once again making Connecticut a great place to live and work, and I urge your support.

Thank you for your time.