



March 14, 2006

Statement by Paul Filson, Director of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Connecticut State Council in support of SB 653 –AN ACT EXPANDING STATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES– before the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

CONNECTICUT
STATE COUNCIL

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
AFL-CIO, CLC

Good morning, Co-Chairs, Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of SEIU's Connecticut State Council. The State Council represents over 53,000 members in Connecticut. SEIU is Connecticut's largest union. We represent health care workers, building service workers, public employees and community college professors and staff. SEIU whole-heartedly supports expanding state employment opportunities for persons with disabilities **SB 653**.

My office has been conducting research on how other states are working with the disabled community to find good jobs with decent pay and decent benefits for the disabled. For the most part the private sector has not been able to provide enough jobs that make accommodations. This has meant that the public sector has had to step up to the plate. Other states including Massachusetts, New York, Michigan and many others have begun to recognize the need and have changed their civil service codes to allow for their states to directly hire and to provide permanent employment for the disabled. They have made accommodations in their codes to allow for modified testing and training. In the end the disabled are hired into state jobs, with state pay and state benefits.

Connecticut must do the same.

The other model is one that often does not recognize the dignity, the abilities or reward the dedication that disabled people often show when given opportunities to perform meaningful work. The model I am speaking of is the sheltered workshop model.

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Sheltered workshops operate with the premise that disabled people must be sheltered and protected. The result has been that often the jobs the workshops perform do not pay living wages. Connecticut uses this model for the most part. Janitorial, food service, landscaping and certain office jobs are outsourced to agencies that work with the disabled. The agency does the training and the coaching and the disabled people do the work. This system does not lead to permanent jobs.

80% of the disabled person's community is unemployed. Connecticut must do its part to hire and provide decent work opportunities for the disabled. Opening up 200 jobs under the General Worker category would not cost Connecticut money, but could conceivably save the state money. Each of these 200 jobs is already being performed by sheltered workshop workers under a set aside program. In many cases we do not know how much the workers are being paid. We do know that huge amounts of overhead are charged to the state by the agencies.

Let's provide real jobs for workers with disabilities. **SB 653** is a step in the right direction.