

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony in Favor of HB 5148, AAC Funding for the
Judicial Branch – February 26, 2010

Good morning Chairman Lawlor and Chairman McDonald and members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm Brian Anderson. I'm a lobbyist for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and private employees. I'm here to speak in favor of HB 5148, AAC Funding for the Judicial Branch.

One of the things that our union strongly opposes is a closing of the three courthouses, the Bristol GA court, the Norwalk Juvenile Matters Court and the Willimantic Juvenile Matters Court.

It's important that the State should have decent geographic distribution for the courthouses. Many of the people that use the courthouses are indigents. Many of them don't have a ready ability to get from one place to the other. Public transportation is very tough in our state.

It would be unfortunate if someone has an infraction, but has to go to court for that infraction and misses their court date, that infraction then becomes a Class A misdemeanor. There are a lot of folks who are not so aware of that and have a difficult time getting from Bristol to New Britain, a journey that's rather difficult to make on public transportation. So we urge that those courthouses remain open.

Our juvenile detention officer members have a very challenging job. They have to try to keep young defendants safe while they're incarcerated, but they suffer from short staffing that makes a challenging job even more challenging.

It's important for them to have full staffing to keep the defendants safe and to keep themselves safe. And when they're short staffed, that's just not possible.

Also, short staffing leads to a problem with workers' compensation costs, which I know the State is trying hard to keep down, and it makes a lot of sense to keep down.

If our State would restore the state federal income tax mix that existed in the fifties, sixties and seventies, or match the income tax rates of our surrounding states, much of this deficit would go away. These cuts don't have to happen. We don't have to have a worse society in the state. Thank you.
