



Connecticut Business & Industry Association

**Testimony of Kia F. Murrell
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Before the Committee on Labor and Public Employees
Hartford, CT
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**H.B. 5299 AAC The Streamlining of the Unemployment Compensation
Appeals Process**

Good Afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and other members of the Committee. My name is Kia Murrell and I am Assistant Counsel for Labor & Employment matters at the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA represents more than 10,000 companies throughout the state of Connecticut, ranging from large corporations to small businesses, but the vast majority of our members are small businesses of fifty or fewer employees. CBIA generally does not support legislation which increases the costs of doing business in the state; creates new administrative burdens for employers; or restricts employers' flexibility in managing their personnel and workplace claims.

The stated purpose of **HB 5299** is to streamline the unemployment compensation hearings process by reducing the level of appeals in the system by one. Currently, the unemployment claims process has several tiers- the initial determination of benefit eligibility, review of claims disputes and contests by an appeals referee, and final review of referee decisions by the Appeals Board of Review.

HB 5299 seeks to speed the finality of unemployment adjudications by eliminating the Board of Review from the process. Although eliminating the Board of Review may make the process speedier, it would also eliminate an important step in the appeals process by preventing any final administrative review of referee decisions.

Referees decide cases based on their subjective interpretation of existing laws and regulations. Referees can and do make mistakes; that's why the Board of Review is the final arbiter in ensuring consistency and accountability among referees' decisions in interpreting unemployment law.

A lack of consistency in unemployment claims decisions ultimately leads to higher costs for employers who are the only sources of funding unemployment benefits. At a time when unemployment rates are high and the state Unemployment trust fund has been insolvent, controlling unemployment costs are crucial to our state's economic recovery.

For the aforementioned reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to reject **HB 5299**.