

If it pleases the Committee.

My name is Attorney Jan van der Werff. I work in a small firm in Bloomfield. For almost 25 years I have dedicated my practice, my life's work to helping injured workers in the State of Connecticut. It has been an honor and a privilege to represent the vast number of my clients. Maybe it's not right, but I become very involved in my clients lives. I highly advise that the client and spouse both meet with me, even after the case settles. I pride myself in helping the injured workers move on. If appropriate, I have them seek vocational rehabilitation, and I help them throughout the process.

Most of my clients have strenuous jobs, and most have had long careers doing heavy work.

This is what happens on that dark day, the day of injury.

- 1) The employees take home pay is slashed by 25%
- 2) Within weeks comes notice of the health insurance cancelation for client and their family
- 3) Soon after, a spinal surgery or a hip or knee replacement. The worker is terminated because he will never be able to handle the rigors of his job.

Depression often sets in, and there is an increase in use of pain medications from pain management. These are dangerous times for my clients; homebound, lost career, lost self-esteem.

These workers would best be served with an element of hope, especially for the young parents. They need to know that the system is not abandoning them. Vocational Rehab is that life boat in many instances.

By way of example, Mr. B. worked for a large corporation. He suffered a herniated cervical disc, requiring a two level fusion. Despite the best efforts of an excellent surgeon, the claimant is precluded from ever returning to his former vocation. We speak weekly, he was rated with a 15% PPD of the Cervical spine at his comp. rate of \$500/week, 15% equates to 17.55 weeks of benefits.

\$8,775.00 for the loss of an 18 year career, that was no fault of the claimant's. At age 41, what Mr. B hopes is that he can acquire the skills necessary that will allow him to obtain a job with dignity, one with insurance for his family. If he cannot get that help, foreclosure is a possibility, and depression is a probability.

Like all agencies, Vocational Rehab should take a commensurate reduction, but abolishing the entire program is too drastic. It squashes the ray of hope I can often give my clients on their darkest days. Please consider the hard working, blue collar voters who put you in office and reconsider you draconian plan of action.

Vocational Rehabilitation is funded by the employers and their comp. insurers, not the taxpayers. Vocational Rehab retrains some of the state's most dedicated workers and should continue in its noble mission. Thank you.