

Testimony of Francis X. Drapeau
Appropriations Committee
**Governor's Bill 6380, An Act Concerning the
Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013**
February 23, 2011

Thank you for the opportunity to appear and comment on Governor's Bill 6380. My name is Francis Drapeau, and I'm an attorney specializing in representing injured workers. I am here to express my concerns over the impact that budget cuts to an already over-taxed workers' compensation system would have on the lives of my current and future clients and the negative impact it will surely have on our state economy.

In difficult economic times, such as these, we are reminded that the best social program is a job. Our workers' compensation system is designed to get injured workers immediate medical care to insure a speedy return to work and to provide lost wage benefits so that the necessities of life can be maintained during the recovery process. Any delay in this process burdens both the injured worker and the employer. Unfortunately, in this current climate, claims handlers are overburdened, and the hearing process has become increasingly important in securing both medical treatment and benefits for injured workers. Budget cuts to this program will mean delays in scheduling hearings and adjudicating cases, meaning individuals will be delayed in their recovery and families will be without a means to support themselves without relying on state assistance. Most of my clients cannot go six weeks without some form of income.

The best social program is a job. I currently represent Mr. Robert Gillespie, a gentleman from Enfield who was disabled from his career as a professional firefighter following a heart attack he suffered in the line of duty. He wanted to be here tonight but could not because he is working part-time while going to school full-time. He is now being retrained, through the Division of Workers' Rehabilitation (DWR), to become a licensed electrician. By the time he came to terms with the reality that he would no longer be able to return to firefighting, both his finances and self-esteem were left in ruins. DWR provided for him a plan and a direction that gives him hope that he'll be able to get back on his feet again and provide for his family. Since enrolling in Porter & Chester Institute, he has maintained perfect attendance and an A average.

The Governor's budget proposes the elimination of DWR which would pull the rug out from under disabled individuals who are working hard at re-entering the state's workforce as productive (and tax-paying) members of our community. DWR is funded by private insurance carriers through assessments and not by the State of Connecticut, and yet, closing DWR will undoubtedly result in burdening state resources. Foreclosing the opportunities that DWR provides will force DWR participants to become reluctantly dependent on state assistance with no plan, no direction and no hope of changing their circumstances, circumstances which were created by suffering a disabling injury at work. The proposed budget cuts to the workers' compensation commission will simply further burden our taxpayer-funded state programs. This negative impact will be real; it will be immediate; and it will be substantial.

The best social program is a job. Please save the Division of Workers' Rehabilitation and recommend against cuts to the Workers' Compensation budget.

Thank you for your time.