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Testimony of Lee Wheeler
Before Committee on Labor and Public Employees

SB 987 – An Act Requiring Community Workforce Agreements for Construction Projects at the Connecticut State University System

March 1, 2011

Good Afternoon, my name is Lee Wheeler and I am a Foreman at Norton Elec, located in Canton, CT and a Member of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut. We work on construction projects in Connecticut.

Unfortunately, as proposed, SB 987 would prevent us from bidding these Connecticut State University System projects. Therefore, I cannot support SB 987.

SB 987 would require that all construction workers on the job come from the union halls. As I am a local, taxpaying construction worker, I would no longer be welcome on this publicly funded project. If my tax dollars are funding these projects, I should be permitted to work on these projects.

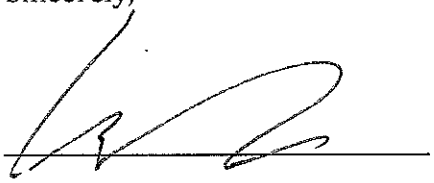
As Connecticut's economy is limping to recover, I would encourage the Committee to review the hurdles that SB 987 would impose on the state's commercial construction industry. SB 987 states that a community workforce agreement would be required for any construction contract at the Connecticut State University System. An agreement with a labor organization is not a solution for CT contractors or the state's struggling economy. The real remedy is a level bidding field where all CT contractors have the opportunity to bid, especially on publicly funded projects paid by CT taxpayers where all employees are highly paid under Connecticut's prevailing wage laws.

I would like to point out that Connecticut has a well trained and highly skilled workforce. Connecticut leads the nation when it comes to requiring licenses for various construction trades, requiring a total of 6 licenses, for installation of HVAC, plumbing, electrical, sheet metal, fire sprinkler, and glass. In addition, the state Department of Administrative Services has in place a rigorous bidding process in which contractors must be 'pre-qualified' before bidding on a publicly-funded state project. This process involves bonding capacity, transparency for political donations, previous work experience, and the prequalification process makes it virtually impossible to have a contract awarded to a contractor without due diligence.

The so-called Community Workforce Agreement would be a government mandated, anti-competitive arrangement that is unnecessary as they are costly and counterproductive. They

detour open, fair and competitive bidding on public works projects. Such agreements would drive up the cost of construction by reducing competition and effectively excluding merit shop contractors and their skilled employees from building projects paid for by their own tax dollars. This would be a terrible misuse of taxpayer money as Connecticut struggles to overcome a $3.7 billion deficit.

SB 987 should not move forward. It would squash the much needed opportunities and competition for creating jobs as the majority of the Construction industry would be unable to meet the unfair bid requirements.

On behalf of the industry, we urge you to oppose SB 987.

Sincerely,