



INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

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Good morning Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrera and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Tiana Lee Ocasio-Nesmith, and I am here on behalf of Local 478, an organization that represents close to 3,500 heavy equipment operators and construction workers throughout Connecticut. I am here today to respectfully request your support of House Bill 31, an act requiring the Operation of Gateway Tolls.

I would like to begin by thanking you for raising this bill. An abundant amount of ideas have been proposed in the past, from tolling only limited access highways, to all-electronic tolling, which allows you to pass without having to slow down.

We understand that residents will always have an issue with tolling. However, it is essential that we consider fairness and equity when we assess the installation of possible systems.

We believe that HB 31 could be extremely successful. More than 25 years ago, tolls were removed from Connecticut's highways and bridges after several people died in a crash at a Stratford toll barrier. What no one can deny is that we are surrounded by states that collect billions in tolls and report relatively few crises, failures and accidents connected to them.

Why should Connecticut's part of I-95 be the only "freeway"? When we drive down the New York Thruway or Massachusetts Turnpike, we're tossing our money into the coffers of those border states. Yet when cars and trucks cross Connecticut, we are the ones footing the bill.

Since tolls were abolished in CT in 1989, out-of-state cars, buses & trucks no longer help defray the high cost of maintaining our roads. To add to that, vehicles are more fuel efficient, resulting in less cars & trucks requiring to stop & get gas.

The public must be made aware of the simplicity of EZ pass systems and we must be assured the Funds will go directly to the State Transportation Fund.

Connecticut must face the reality that we can no longer afford transportation costs by collections from the gas or gross receipts taxes. We must be fair, use the newest in twenty-first century technology, and we must act promptly.

We appreciate your consideration of this Bill.