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HB5433: AN ACT CREATING A PROCEDURE FOR PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANTS TO COLLECTIVELY BARGAIN WITH THE STATE.

Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Debbie Barisano and I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am opposed to HB5433- AN ACT CREATING A PROCEDURE FOR PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANTS TO COLLECTIVELY BARGAIN WITH THE STATE. I was a personal assistant for over ten years, the founder of the Connecticut Association of Personal Assistance (better known as CTAPA), and currently Vice-President of the CTAPA Board. As a personal assistant, I worked directly for the person with a disability. I did not work for an agency and I was not an independent contractor.

Personal assistants perform duties that the person with a disability cannot do for themselves. Because of the intimate nature of our work, a unique relationship develops between the personal assistant and the employer with a disability. This relationship is what draws people to the job and makes them more reliable. I would equate the relationship to family. Personal assistants stayed with their employers in shelters during the October snow storm. Personal assistants have slept on the floor next to an employer who is sick. They have also supported their employer in the hospital. A team of personal assistants supported an employer in emotional and practical ways so she can terminate a bad assistant. I drove my employer from Plymouth Massachusetts to her home in a blinding snow storm that closed the highways. I have traveled with my employer on business and personal trips.

The union forcing themselves between the personal assistant and the person with a disability will ruin this relationship, and some personal assistants have said they may leave the job. Also there is nowhere in the bill that prohibits a strike so this would put personal assistants in an adversarial role. While I realize that this is a drafting error, and that *everyone* from the SEIU to the Governor to the people who actually wrote the bill intends there to be a no-strike clause, it just shows how much this process has been rushed at the expense of accuracy and careful consideration of the issues.

Another way a personal assistant would be hurt by this legislation is with the deduction of union dues. This bill clearly states in section 3(1) and 3(2) what cannot be negotiated for and I agree completely. I am afraid that the personal assistant would get no benefit from the unionization but would be forced to pay union dues or agency fees to the union.

I hear a lot about how well the union is working in Massachusetts. I recently went to lunch at a friend's house, and she had invited a friend of hers who has a disability and employs personal assistants. The woman was an hour and a half late because her personal assistant was an hour and a half late to work. During lunch she told us how few personal assistants she had and it was hard to find new assistants who were reliable. Does this sound like the union has helped people in Massachusetts? It doesn't to me.

I have been a life-long Democrat and I voted for Governor Malloy. Now I feel betrayed by him. After the legislators in the last session voted down unionization of personal assistants, Governor Malloy with the stroke of a pen signed Executive Order 10, overriding the will of the General Assembly. Is this a democracy? Not in my eyes. I was always taught that we had the House and the Senate and the Executive Branch and Judicial Branch. What happened to the separation of powers in our state Constitution?

Why should a great job be hurt by forced unionization? The union will say that no one will be forced to join, but anyone who doesn't will be charged an agency fee against his/her will. That is still an act of force. Why do you want to put people with disabilities in a dangerous position because they lose personal assistants as a result of forced unionization?

Please oppose HB5433 and save personal assistants' great relationship with their employers.

Deborah L. Barisano