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Daniel L. Durant Jr.

## **Testimony RE: S.B. 352 and H.B. 5433**

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Daniel L. Durant Jr. and I submit this testimony in favor of HB 5433 and SB 352.

As a fulltime membership and community solidarity coordinator for the American Federation of Teachers of CT (AFT CT), part time lab instructor at Manchester Community College (MCC), President of the Annie Fisher STEM magnet school PTO, and board member of CT Center for a New Economy (CCNE) I serve several roles in my community. Today, however, I offer this testimony as the son of a disabled CNA, husband of a full-time state employee and proud father of three children, including one pre-school aged daughter.

First, I will speak to HB 5433 which is a common sense piece of legislation that takes into consideration the fact that when you are in the business of taking care of people who can not take care of themselves you should have the means to take care of yourself. Allowing home health aides the right to bargain for even the most basic securities such as workers compensation, healthcare and FMLA is essential. The hard work of lifting, feeding, grooming and taking caring of clients who depend on aides totally is no easy task and neither is it always safe.

My mother, who is now permanently disabled from a back injury she sustained while caring for a client in a nursing home, was just 49 years old when she was told by doctors she could no longer perform the work she had been certified to do for decades. She was heartbroken for having to leave her profession. Despite having several operations and removing nerves and moving displaced discs and putting pins in her back, she still suffers from severe pain to this very day. Yet she is one of the lucky ones. She was returned to her nursing home and spent quality time with clients she had grown close to for months before even 'light duty' became unbearable and she had to leave the profession for good. After giving so much of her self for so long she was in need of assistance and in the end was awarded a worker's compensation settlement that helped to sustain her while our family sought a more permanent solution.

Home health aides face the same risks and tragedy without institutional supports such as light duty or workers compensation. The risk of injury to a caregiver is high and compounded by the fact that if something does go wrong both the caregiver and the client are alone and may be without immediate recourse. Working conditions such as these and many others, too numerous to mention, can be addressed through the collective ingenuity of an organized workforce. These workers are not asking for the government to fix their problems for them. They are just asking for the right to collective bargaining to fix things for themselves. There is no added cost in ensuring that these, mostly all women and mothers, get the right to advocate for themselves while they care for others. I support this bill for all the mothers out there who, like my own mother, risk their own health and safety to care for those who can not care for themselves.

I also support SB 352 for similar reasons. While the risks associated with caring for adult clients can be the same with child clients, and the issue of fairness is identical, there are additional considerations as well. As a father of a four year old the third time around, I am relieved to know that the following year my child will be entering Kindergarten. Because my wife and I both

work full-time, she has been in a private daycare/preschool for several years. Aside from knowing that I can send her to a public school next year, I also know that she will be entering that school able to read. Many parents do not have that feeling of relief because they may not have been able to afford to pay the difference between the care4kids allotment and the costs associated with private day care, not have gotten into one of the very limited slots across the state, or simply don't have the means, either transportation or otherwise, to get their child to a daycare that will teach their child to read before kindergarten. If there were better or more viable options available to Care 4 Kids recipients who do manage to send their children to pre-school, perhaps more would choose the child care option.

Given the opportunity to organize, child care providers and their representative bodies could make themselves more marketable by soliciting and expanding the professional development available to them. Education has gotten significant attention this legislative session and one of the primary objectives of the governor's bill SB 24 is the expansion of early childhood education. If the achievement gap begins in pre-school then it stands to reason that investment in early childhood education is crucial to closing it. Child care providers should have the right to organize themselves for the uplifting of their profession but also for the uplifting of our state by helping to close the achievement gap. The more investment we make in early childcare, either through home child care providers such as those who are the subject of this bill, or through additional slots as the governor proposes, the more narrow the achievement gap becomes.

Lastly, as a home owner, tax payer and passionate voter I believe it is my duty to support legislation and legislators that focus their attention on ways to utilize state resources efficiently. It is wonderful that Medicaid clients have the option of selecting their own care givers rather than being institutionalized. It is good for them but it is also good for the state. There is no question that the costs associated with institutionalized care grossly outweigh that of home care. In a time where people, such as my wife who is a state employee, are giving concessions in their pay and benefits in order to balance the state budget it seems like programs that save the state money such as these should be expanded and not neglected. Investing in making these jobs better through collective bargaining may result in an increased number of clients preferring the home care option over the institutionalized care option and that spells savings.

In closing, it seems our state is at a crossroads of opportunity. From school reform to collective bargaining for the home care and child care providers, we have tremendous opportunity in front of us, but not if we don't act. The expansion of home care and early child care are huge incentives to get this bill passed. We, as a state pay for it one way or another, why not invest early on when the investment is less expensive than be reactive and try to fix things once they have already been broken. This is common sense legislation and costs the state nothing. If collective bargaining results in any additional costs, they are nullified by the savings associated with the expansion of these programs that will undoubtedly occur.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Thank you in advance for supporting HB 5433 and SB 352.

Sincerely,  
Daniel L. Durant Jr.