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Madame Chairwoman, Mister Chairperson, and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

I thank you for the opportunity to give testimony in support of raised S.B. No. 154 AN ACT CONCERNING STATE EMPLOYEES AND VIOLENCE AND ABUSIVE CONDUCT IN THE WORKPLACE.

I am a state employee, but more importantly, I was the friend of a person, Marlene Braun, who took her own life, in fact, who shot herself in the head, as a result of abusive conduct at work. At the time this happened, in May of 2005, I had not heard of workplace bullying, but I learned quickly about this devastating, epidemic, and ubiquitous problem. I also know this committee has worked diligently if unsuccessfully to try to address workplace bullying in the past. Now is the time to commit ourselves, as citizens of Connecticut, to creating and maintaining the healthiest workplaces we can.

The bill proposes a definition of abusive conduct which I support, but would also like to amend with one added definition: after subsection (d)(1)(C), Connecticut Healthy Workplace Advocates would like to see inserted this language: "or attempts to exploit an employee's known psychological or physical vulnerability." We believe that this language is essential because so often abusive conduct at work, takes this form.

I will give one example of the hundreds I could give. In 2006, I heard this story from a target of bullying: Her 12-year-old son had been murdered before she started her current job. After his death, she took a job in a new government agency and all was well until a new supervisor came in who quickly found about the boy's murder. Nearly every week this supervisor found occasion to bring up the child's death. The target asked the supervisor specifically to stop discussing her son's murder, but the supervisor persisted, exploiting a known psychological vulnerability, which continued until the employee was able to transfer. By then, the employee was on medication for an anxiety disorder which she had never had before, not even at the time her own son was murdered.

And we can't pass this story off as exceptional. Over the six years I have been an anti-workplace bullying advocate I have heard numerous, equally outrageous stories. Workers are humiliated for necessary bathroom breaks, for having cancer, for being pregnant. According to US Census data, Connecticut had approximately 66,500 full-time equivalent state employees in 2010. According to studies conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute in 2007 and 2010, with Zogby Research International, 35-37% of the American workforce has been bullied at work. So in our state, among state employees, there are about 24,000 who have experienced abusive conduct at work.

Will reporting reflect these numbers? We know that people are more likely to respond to anonymous surveys than they are to complain to HR departments, which many employees do not consider "friendly" to their interests, whether that perception is correct or not. Employees who are current targets, which from other data we might estimate at 4,000, are

afraid of retaliation. Unlike protected class harassment and hostile environment claims, targets of bullying have no law to protect them, and many do not even work in places with policies about abusive conduct at work.

It is my sincere hope that raised SB 154 will be the first step toward enacting a Healthy Workplace Bill that will allow targets who are maliciously and intentionally abused at work to have a remedy when their health is harmed, and which will also incentivize companies and the state and municipalities to develop policies about abusive conduct.

You will hear testimony against this bill claiming that state workplaces have civility policies and the means to handle personality conflicts and so forth. They will talk about mutual respect and they will try to convince you that this is only a small internal problem that doesn't need state monitoring or state law. It is *beyond* incivility to remind a mother of her child's murder once a week. It is *beyond* a personality conflict to sabotage a colleague's work repeatedly, and it is *beyond* "a boss with no people skills" to admonish an employee to correct typos with a marginal comment that says, "Are you stupid? Look at these typos!"

The words in this statute that define abusive conduct describe real life situations that are far from abstract. As a result of abusive conduct at work, employees take sick days, fail to perform at their peak, come to hate jobs they formerly loved, seek additional counseling and health services, suffer from depression, anxiety, heart problems, hypertension, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation. It was not an abstract day for me when I went to the funeral home to view my friend's body after her autopsy. We had been friends for 33 years. The corpse in front of me was far from the beautiful, ebullient blonde she had been only eighteen months earlier. I can still hear her laugh, but now only in my mind.

And that brings me to my last point. Abusive conduct at work hurts the target of the abuse, but it has repercussions far beyond that. My own life was shattered by what happened to my friend. Her workplace was turned upside down. I hear often from people whose spouses are divorcing them, or whose friends have abandoned them, because they can no longer take the stress. This intimate psychological violence in the workplace, just like domestic violence, takes its toll on every family member and friend of the employee. Remember that the step you are taking here today will be the start to improving workplaces in the state, and it may also save lives. Our state has had enough deaths from violence in the workplace, whether by murders or suicides or the countless and uncountable stress-related health problems from which people die too young. We have to stop it before it escalates. One day, I hope we will be back here at a public hearing for the Healthy Workplace Bill.¹ Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Prof. David Yamada, J.D., "Healthy Workplace Bill," Workplace Bullying Institute, <http://www.healthyworkplacebill.org/bill.php>