

March 8, 2012

CT Labor and Public Employees Committee

**SB 154 An Act Concerning State Employees and Violence and Abusive Conduct in the Workplace**

Good Afternoon Committee Members,

My name is Teresa Asija I am a registered nurse. I have been employed by the State of Connecticut for the past five years.

I have first-hand knowledge of being a target of abusive conduct in the work place otherwise known as bullying both at a personal and professional level this offensive behavior has been directed toward my-self and my colleagues. This happens at many levels, supervisors to nurses, nurses to physicians etc. It also takes many forms, from interference with practice, false accusations of errors, and bosses making up or changing rules as they go along.

One personal experience I had was when a nursing supervisor, questioned me on my personal life in a locked pharmacy and I was unable to leave. I was totally taken aback at this behavior and when I asked another nurse whom I was working with what was happening they responded, "Oh that's just how she is, she likes to get "dirt" on you and use it against you later. This same supervisor has intimidated me by using other staff that she favors to harass me. When I have reported it to her supervisor nothing was been done and the harassment increased. I have been accused of things I have not done and not given the opportunity to defend myself and even if I have it has been to no avail. Once they are "after you" they will find anything to "get you on". I have been told on many occasions "That is the culture here, they do whatever they want, get used to it." Having to deal with the harassment and unprofessional behavior on a daily basis has a direct negative impact on my life.

On one occasion I was bullied by this supervisor's best friend at work. I was told by this LPN that I sat in "HER CHAIR" and I had no right to sit there. When I tried to tell her that this was the only chair available at lunch and no one was sitting in it and I would have gotten up if she would have asked me to. She yelled at me and she dismissed me as if I were a servant. I reported this to the administrator to no avail. This LPN continues to do this to other coworkers and new staff. I also have experienced retaliatory behaviors for reporting her.

My supervisor gives me the silent treatment and discusses with staff members other employees issues. She has removed me from some of my duties so as to alienate me from my coworkers. This treatment intensified when the administrator got his hands on a letter of no confidence that staff started and was sent out. Many of the people who signed this letter are all

in some sort of investigation or suspension process currently. In light of issues such as this, adding language to support no retaliation for reporting would be a helpful addition to this bill.

This is just some examples of what I and most of my colleagues must endure; my colleagues have awful stories as well. Many are too afraid to speak they take the abuse and go home and crying. I have witnessed this so much it makes me physically ill. The abuses I and many of my coworkers have endured have had many repercussions in our home life as well.

One may ask, why don't you just leave, get another job? Well, that is easier said than done, and why should I have to? Don't I deserve a healthy workplace? Shouldn't my employer care enough about me to provide me with that? Would you want your family member to have to endure such abuse at their jobs?

Many people don't speak up. The individual may be afraid to lose his job or else afraid to leave on a bad note which will affect future employment. Not to mention the psychological impact of going to a job every day where you feel like you must "fight for your life". The medical implications of this amount of stress on a person are no secret. I have personal knowledge of many coworkers that have been forced to see a doctor just to be able to deal with the abusive conduct they must endure to keep their job. This is ridiculous. I personally have developed anxiety disorder and had to go on medication.

In general, targets are those employees that are more highly trained and qualified. They are valuable employees that our laws should protect. Sometimes, and only sometimes when someone does complain there is a hasty investigation and nothing changes. However, the retaliation gets worse. This results in high turnover, lawsuits and unnecessary bad publicity. The cost of allowing abusive conduct in the workplace to continue is staggering.

Finally, I would like to state, maybe if we had laws in place to protect targets from such health harming actions, we wouldn't have as much violence. Maybe, just maybe the targets got forced into being the aggressor. Maybe some of the people in the past resorted to violence because they felt that was the only way to get the abuse to stop. This is a sad but accurate account of a person who feels they have no other choice. I believe if we deal with abusive behavior in the workplace it will reduce the violence we so often read about.

Thank you,

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