National Popular Vote – H.B. 5126- February 24, 2014

Co-Chairs Senator Musto and Representative Jutila, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in **favor** of H.B. No. 5126 AN ACT CONCERNING AN AGREEMENT AMONG THE STATES TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES BY NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of the Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council. SEIU represents over 65,000 members in Connecticut.

Grassroots organizing is vital for any group of people hoping to have an effect on politics. It is, of course, a trusted tool of the labor movement in our work on behalf of working families.

When it comes to the election of the President, however, the rules of organizing are warped substantially. For a "safe" state like Connecticut, the benefits of citizen engagement are practically erased within our borders. For example, when our union in CT wants to get involved in a presidential election, we organize our members to drive or we hire a bus to New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania or another swing state. Our members who choose to donate money for politics see much of that money sent to other states.

It is an unfortunate fact that only a few states truly matter in presidential elections.

Because presidential candidates stand to gain the same seven electors from Connecticut whether they win by 51% or 90%, a candidate who is certain to win will feel that showing up and listening to voters here isn't worth the time. The same goes for any candidate who is certain to lose. This makes no sense, and causes Connecticut to be ignored again and again.

Beyond the political argument in favor of changing a system that excludes so many of us, and sends Connecticut to the sidelines, we must be mindful of the problem of political equality. Today every vote is not equal in our country.

Moreover, this inequality serves no purpose. Unlike what we may have been taught in high school civics classes, the current system does not, in practice, give special weight to any state, nor protect small states. New Hampshire is a small state that happens to be closely divided, and therefore candidates will go there to ask for votes –but never to Rhode Island or Vermont. Ohio is very large state that is closely divided, and so candidates will go there –but never to Texas. Fully two thirds of our states, large and small, red and blue, are thought of as nothing more than flyovers at worst, and ATMs at best.

After the most recent election I asked some of our union's staff involved in politics what they thought of the current electoral vote system. I was told "since it is working for us now why change it?" Seemingly, over the course of only 12 years a political amnesia set in as many forgot the injustice of the 2000 elections. Then a few weeks after the 2012 elections we all began to see, once again, how the current electoral system is so open to political manipulation as several states introduced legislation to change how electors are awarded in order to assure one Party's domination in future elections. Majority vote for Presidential elections eliminates this kind of political gaming.

We ought to elect the president the same way we elect every other office in the United States—according to the principle of one person one vote. NPV gives us the mechanism to do just that. Our votes will count and so will Connecticut.