

Melanie DeVito
Testimony before the Labor and Public Employees Committee of the
Connecticut General Assembly
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Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Melanie DeVito. I've worked as a Probate Court Officer in the Central CT Regional Children's Probate Court for almost 8 years. I'm in **support of HB 5066: AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN WORKERS' RIGHTS TO COLELCTIVELY BARGAIN.** This legislation would give me the ability to have a voice at work by forming a union if the majority of my coworkers so choose.

Two years ago I signed a union card because my coworkers and I thought we deserved better. We had not had a raise for several years, had lost one week's vacation as the probate courts consolidated and lost our paid lunch hour as we continued to pay more than twice what real state employees paid for the same health insurance benefits. We had nowhere to turn and no voice to be heard. A salary study was conducted at that time and compared us to workers in Tennessee and therefore our salaries (which are considerably lower for similar work as state employees) were not adjusted. Again we had no voice to discuss our concerns or objections. Since we signed card, we have finally had a cost of living and merit raise. I am sure this is not a coincidence.

As a Probate Court Officer I am expected to sort through and find resolution for some of the most difficult family situations involving children. I bring together conferences with parents, family members, attorneys and must negotiate with them to find the best outcomes. These are not easy matters. They involve both a detailed knowledge of the law, as well as an understanding of child development and needs. This is the type of job that you cannot leave at work and shut off, it stays with you.

For this I think we deserve the right to participate in the negotiating of the benefits and issues that affect us directly rather than having a budget committee of three judges determining this. We are not here looking for a pay raise or other big, expensive benefits. We are looking for the right to make a decision about our own lives: do we want to be able to bargain collectively or not. I hope that this committee will give us the right to make that decision.