

Testimony by Carrie Greatheart, West Haven

In support of Governor's H.B. # 5054: ***AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYED JOB SEEKERS***

February 18, 2014

Public & Public Employees Committee

Good Afternoon, my name is Carrie Greatheart and I am a resident of West Haven. I want to start by thanking Governor Malloy, Legislative Leaders and the Committee for raising the important concept of prohibiting the practice of employers excluding the currently unemployed from the qualified candidate pool. In today's job market I recognize that there is no magic bullet that will land all qualified candidates a job, but I can tell you from personal experience as an older job seeker that this proposal will help chip away at the barriers to employment that active job seekers, especially older job seekers, face in Connecticut.

Prior to my layoff in 2009, I worked thirty-two years in Human Resources. I have been out of work since that time and I am currently 56 years old. My most recent position was that of Human Resources Specialist. I was responsible for the high-volume, full cycle recruiting process for both manufacturing and professional positions within a manufacturing environment. In addition to staffing, I also supported the company diversity initiatives by facilitating and/or coordinating diversity events and championed an intern program that created a pool of diverse candidates for future entry level positions. As a Labor and Employee Relations Representative I addressed and resolved employee issues, communicated company policies and procedures to management and employees. I participated in manufacturing contract negotiations meetings, arbitrations, and court proceedings. I was also responsible for managing the random pool for the FAA Drug and Alcohol Compliance Program and administrated the FMLA policy for and assigned groups

My experience is within Human Resources, so I am aware of the challenges that older job seekers encounter when seeking employment. If the individual has the qualifications, the next hurdle they may have to get over is the age. If they are confident, they may survive. If not they may just give up and surrender to not securing employment or becoming underemployed, or maybe take early Social Security if eligible. When you combine the challenges and stigma of being an older job seeker with the fact that nationally, jobseekers age 55 and up spend an average of 46 weeks looking for work, as compared to 34 weeks for younger jobseekers, you have a recipe for disaster.

I am aware of how a gap in your resume can impact your job search. During the initial period of my unemployment I was a caregiver for my husband who had incurred a serious injury. I also took the opportunity to pursue a long time interest of mine. I utilized the online training programs provided by the Department of Labor to keep me current on Human Resources regulations. To avoid being idle during the job search I am an active volunteer. Currently, I volunteer approximately ten hours a week. As a Tax Aide volunteer, I provide tax preparation services through the AARP Tax Counseling for the Elderly Program. Also, I am a Community Engagement Specialist for AARP and provide information to other women on the importance of preparing for their future life. Most recently I joined the AARP CT Affordable Health Care Act Speakers Bureau to assist in providing information to the public on the Affordable Health Care Act.

My inability to secure employment after such a long period of time has made me question my self-worth and it has impacted the family finances. I realize that this is a competitive. However, I have applied for positions in the area that I most recently worked in to positions that entail administrative functions from prior years, without success. I must confess that at one point, I stopped looking for work, but those days are over.

I worked in Human Resources, I get it. Companies do not care how much experience you have, they want to know if it is relevant to this available opening and can you add value to the organization. I am just looking for an opportunity to prove that I can still add value. We must keep in mind when they say the unemployment rate has gone down, it does not necessarily mean people are finding jobs. Some people are just so dejected that they have stopped looking. I do not want to succumb to that group; I cannot afford to at this juncture in my life. Unemployment tears at the family dynamic and creates so many problems within the family. I just want to tell employers not to count the unemployed out. I worked at a company for thirty-two years. Even though they felt my time was up there, the experience I gained while employed will be valuable at another company.

I am hopeful that this proposal, in combination with proposals coming out of the Program Review & Investigations Committee; aimed at supporting the older job seeker, make 2014 the year that Connecticut takes significant steps toward leveling the playing field for motivated job seekers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.