



Council 4 AFSCME Testimony, Labor Committee, March 4, 2015

My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative and political representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 32,000 Connecticut public and private employee members.

Council 4 supports HB 6932, AAC Paid Family Leave. There is strong evidence that many of our fellow citizens cannot take family and medical leave when their families need them to because they cannot afford to go unpaid even for a few weeks. Paid leave allows people to do this through a small financial assist, considerably less than their normal salaries.

There are some changes that would make the bill better. We request that:

- * this bill should cover all workers and not just be an "opt in." To achieve the economy of scale that makes this program affordable, all workers should be included.
- * the definition of "son or daughter" not be age limited.
- * the many requirements for eligibility be removed.

Another missing element in the bill is some financial assistance from employers. Paid leave benefits employers by keeping workers mentally and physically healthy and able to perform their tasks. A UCLA survey of employers has found that they believe that paid leave had a positive effect, or no negative effect, on their businesses. We urge the committee to include some substantial employer financial contribution towards a paid leave model – at least bearing half of the cost along with the employees.

We hear much in the State Capitol about the difficulties business face. The state should help to foster a healthy, growing economy for business owners when it can. It has already done much in this direction. But an economy is built on capital and labor. What has been neglected too often in public policy is alleviating the difficulty that working families face. The state of the working family is in far more peril than that of commerce. The U.S. Census Bureau recently reported that fifty percent of all American families are now "working poor" or less in financial status. The U.S. Federal Reserve reported last year that the average American family has lost forty percent of its accumulated wealth since 2007. The Southern Education Foundation has recently found that more than 50% of public school children are eligible for the free lunch allowed to poor families. The working family is in a state of crisis.

Paid leave helps families at a moment when care for a loved one is desperately needed. Having family members care for a sick relative can lessen the cost of government programs which otherwise might have to step in. Research shows that allowing parents time to bond with a newly arrived child can result in far better outcomes for that child's future life. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

SB 1035: An Act Concerning Workplace Bill

March 5, 2015

I'm here today as a self-employed business woman. I have a long history in business working at the executive level and I also have been the victim of a workplace bully. She was verbally abusive, threw hissy fits, slammed things, moved computer files so I couldn't get work done, lied, and changed my work. Our boss promised he would deal with her, asked me to be patient, told me she had "issues", but ultimately turned out to be as afraid of her as everyone else and allowed the bullying to continue and escalate. Fortunately for me I had the financial wherewithal to leave the job. I can't provide specifics because there was a financial settlement and I agreed not to discuss it. However I left behind office staff who do not have the financial option to leave and who continue to suffer. One of the bully's favorite targets was a woman that she would scream at, telling her she was stupid and useless. She delighted in terrorizing her. The woman was so beaten and defeated by the bully that she came to believe it was all her fault. Unlike sexual harassment, bullying is all inclusive, committed by people across all lines to all kinds of targets. 68% of female bullies target women, compared to 32% of the male bullies.

When I left that job I was shocked to find that bullying is legal. While we work to stop the awful effects of bullying in schools, we have no protection in the workforce. We look to you to remedy this travesty. As a result of my experience I joined in support of the Healthy Workplace Bill authored by David Yamada.

Bullying is not only morally wrong, it's bad for business. Bullies drive away good employees and damage the ones that remain, which impacts productivity. There is also the potential for someone who has been repeatedly bullied to lash out and commit workplace violence.

We need a bill- but not this bill. A bad bill is worse than no bill at all. While I admire enthusiasm, we need a bill that was developed based on expertise, not just enthusiasm. Instead of no bill, or this bad bill, let's make a good bill.

Here's what's wrong with this bill, and how it can be improved:

1. The language that defines "abuse" isn't effective. Use language that is agreed upon by psychologists and experts in the field.
2. While training as defined in SB 1035 is an appropriate start, training alone is not a remedy for bullying victims.
3. The politically appointed board recommended in SB 1035 is not comprised of experts who actually know anything about bullying. Even if the board were to be composed of experts, they have no ability to help the targets and would cost state taxpayers money. Our Healthy Workplace Bill is budget-neutral.

Please revise this bill against the model of David Yamada's bill so that it doesn't just intend to help targets- it truly does. CT Healthy Workplace advocates have sent the committee a copy of the HWB under separate cover.

Mary Beth Nelsen, Co-Coordinator, CT Healthy Workplace
80 Coppermine Rd Oxford CT 07478
203-732-3065