



Council 4 AFSCME Testimony

Labor Committee

1/29/15

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:

S.B. No. 593 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SEVERE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENT AND WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE.

This bill extends workers' compensation to that very small number of employees who are unlucky enough to experience a catastrophe on the job. Sadly, Connecticut has learned a lot about this in the last two months. Our Newtown school employees never expected December 14, 2012 to change their lives forever. They never expected to have a close brush with death or experience a mass murder in their elementary school.

This bill requires that a licensed psychiatrist or psychologist would have to certify that an employee was experiencing work related post traumatic stress disorder syndrome before they would be eligible to access such workers compensation coverage. It would also have to be certified that the employee witnessed the death or maiming of another person. Council 4 believes that the language should be changed to also cover acts of nature or accidents that meet the same test otherwise. It is just as traumatic to experience death or maiming through an accidental fire, explosion or act of nature. No matter how you look at it, this coverage would only apply to a small number of workers and is a humane thing to pass.

Council 4 also supports:

Proposed H.B. No. 5080 AN ACT CONCERNING LARGE RETAIL STORES AND EMPLOYMENT OF WORKERS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

This bill allows retail employees of stores of 5,000 square feet or larger to decline working certain holidays without penalty.

Proposed H.B. No. 5124 AN ACT CONCERNING CONSECUTIVE WORKDAYS AND HOLIDAY PAY.

This bill states that employers would have to pay overtime (time and a half) for working more than five out of seven consecutive days or for working Sundays or holidays.

Council 4 opposes:

Proposed H.B. No. 5070 AN ACT CONCERNING TIMETABLES FOR MUNICIPAL BINDING ARBITRATION.

Proposed H.B. No. 5211 AN ACT CONCERNING UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES AND ARBITRATION DECISION TIMELINES.

Council 4 opposes HB 5070 and 5211 because it tampers with the existing arbitration time frame. Changing the time frame results in a less flexible situation which could inadvertently force municipalities and unions into going to binding arbitration when it is not necessary. It is best to avoid arbitration, when it can be avoided, because it can take up to two years to resolve and results in additional costs for both parties.

Both sides of the table in contract disputes that end up in arbitration have equal ability to work out stipulated agreements on the schedule of briefs, reply briefs and last best offers. This bill would strip that ability and impose rigid times. Currently, the parties rarely fail to work out a schedule that comports with the availability of expert witnesses and other scheduling events necessary to the presentation of a complete case. In most cases, even where the parties are far apart, they are able to reach agreement on the schedule. These bills are a case of trying to fixing what isn't broken."

Proposed H.B. No. 5210 AN ACT CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES.

Proposed H.B. No. 5265 AN ACT CONCERNING MINIMUM LONGEVITY REQUIREMENTS FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

Proposed H.B. No. 5267 AN ACT CREATING AN EMPLOYERS' BILL OF RIGHTS.

Employers already enjoy vast power over their employees, more so in our country than in any other Western democracy. At a time when the majority of our citizens is slipping into working poverty (the U.S. Census Bureau has reported that half of American families are working poor, the Southern Education Foundation reported recently that more than half of all U.S. students are poor), what more power over their employees do employers need?