

Rep. Terzyak, Sen. Gomes and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

I am offering written testimony in support of SB 1035, AN ACT CONCERNING BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE. I very much regret that I cannot give in-person testimony. I have been advised by counsel to refrain due to an active arbitration process. My bully is a Gov. Malloy appointee who seems to enjoy unfettered support of the administration, key legislators and commissioners, many who already repeatedly been alerted to the ongoing toxic and hostile work environment during her tenure. Multiple requests to the administration and legislators from agency employees have gone unanswered. She appears to be explaining that some staff left on their own free will or that they were “rogue” employees, somehow that explains away an +60% turnover that never existed prior to her appointment leaving her to carry on. The lackluster response has not only empowered the bully, substantially impacting the medical and mental health of state employees but is also rapidly increasing the already immense financial cost to the state taxpayers.

Prior to joining this state agency, I was already a successful advocate in my own. I was a proud appointee by Sen. Donald Williams to the Medicaid Managed Care Council (now MAPOC) and was honored when requested by the producers of *60 Minutes* to consult on their recent and powerful expose, “*Denied*”, detailing the horrific abuses against the mentally ill by insurance companies. It seemed a natural move to offer my skill set to an agency that had an incredible reputation for advocating for CT citizens.

Who would have believed that doing so would end in an abusive, unbearable work environment that had a long-term impact on my well-being, reputation, career and my family. For 18 months, I was lauded by supervisors, consumers, insurance colleagues and fellow advocates. But immediately after raising issues about serious abuse of state time and salary discrepancies within that agency, I was given my first review in 18 months. I went from a valued employee, to an over-supervised, criticized and bullied employee. My workload was increased, my new supervisor was general counsel for the agency because in the agency's head words "he represents the best interests of the office". I quickly became the "target" as the agency head engaged not only the general counsel but another close friend and employee to assist in the bullying.

There is no way to describe the fear-based environment created by management seemingly overnight, **first towards me and then almost every staff member in the office.** In the last few months of employ, I was followed on breaks, to colleague's desks, and to the bathroom by my male supervisor. One day I will never forget. I was aggressively confronted in my office by the agency head in an erratic state, refusing me egress, yelling at me as I stood shaking and crying. I asked her to let me leave as I was having chest pains. She mocked me and told me she would call 911. The general counsel joined her in the door. They eventually backed out of the doorframe but once down the hallway, she continued to follow me, yelling at me in front of my colleagues and those in the adjacent agency. I got to the ladies' room, shaken and fearful, and remained there until two colleagues could assist me in leaving the building safely. Once a confident, fearless advocate, I was quickly reduced to hiding in fear in my office, isolated from my closest peers who feared retaliation for associating with me. One employee was told by her supervisor to avoid the assumption that she and I were friends or "you will be next."

The office environment had become increasingly toxic but it did not stop with me. Multiple memos and request for assistance to stabilize the environment were ignored by the human resource specialist. She blatantly disregarded the State's Workplace Violence Policy and Procedures refusing to involve the Threat Assessment Team as required by CT law and refusing to bring in any outside assistance. I sought the support of my union, SEIU 1199. HR and the agency head refused to allow me union representation in meetings unless it was a specific requirement under the contract. [Even after I was placed on leave, the agency head refused to meet with the union despite several complaints of its members about abusive environment.] Elizabeth Robinson, Director of EAP came to the office and sat through a staff meeting. The entire meeting consisted of an exclusive, upbeat, and unrelated dialogue between her and the agency head about the office's mission. It was clear she was there for a "horse and pony" show. We all sat there stunned and silent.

In the end, I felt I should meet with an EAP staffer hoping it would "back the bully off". He suggested I sit with the agency head to engage them in a "starting over point." At first the bully agreed, then stated the EAP director told her not to meet with me. I was persistent in my requests for HR assistance and she persistently ignored the issues (same HR specialist that "mishandled" the publicized bullying of Insurance Department employees a couple years earlier). Help was not forthcoming. After a workplace violence training in the office I spoke with the trainer about the issue. She was concerned enough to recommend I alert Pamela Libby, Director, Statewide Human Resources Management, DAS and Raymond Philbrick at CPP Director of Safety and Security Statewide Security Unit, DAS. When I received no response, I sent my letters certified. Still there was no response. I sent them again and again. Eventually

Mr. Philbrick sent me a curt response months later stating he did not have jurisdiction over the issue. Who was going to help? Even the very detailed regulations under the State of Connecticut Workplace Violence Policy and Procedures were completely ignored. When there was no response to my memo to HR detailing the abusive, aggressive conduct, I was forced to raise my complaint to a "Workplace Violence" complaint. Almost a month later, the complaint was found "unsubstantiated" after interviewing the two other office bullies and ignoring my request she interview the non-management staff who witnessed the event. Within weeks I was placed on long term paid administrative leave. I did everything in my power. The entire system failed me and enabled her to continue harming others, seemingly with a blank check from the State.

When I began at this agency there were approximately 15 people, 10 of which were non-management. I may have been the first victim of this newly appointed agency head but sadly I was not the last. Of the original staff, only 2 are still employed by the agency and remain in their cubicles with their curtains pulled the entire work day. After I was targeted, three (3) more employees have been fired (one (1) of which was reinstated to her position, two (2) are in arbitration), two (2) were forced into stipulated agreements, one (1) resigned before she was fired under extreme pressure and unforgivable personal attacks, and two (2) more were searching for employment to escape the toxic environment and just recently found new jobs. I am hoping you can understand their fear is real and silence their only protection.

I was offered six (6) figures to settle but State punitively decided that they would not clear the false allegations against me. Additionally, I would have to present my stipulated agreement to each and every state office I applied to. Bullies to the end. My honor and integrity is worth more than money.

The following is an estimation of the amount of monies spent to date in their attempts to silence and discredit just me:

- \$40,000 for 5 months of paid leave with benefits
- \$16,000 in unemployment benefits
- \$6,500 arbitrator fees
- \$8,000 (estimate) in court reporter fees (unheard of in state arbitrations)
- \$5,000 (estimate) paid by agency to transcribe CDs of DOL appeal hearings
- Two years of state resources by two OLR employees to investigate and litigate two levels of union grievances, preparation and execution of 4 full days of arbitration, and briefs
- Two DAS investigators (normally investigations are handled by in house HR; the agency head called her fellow commissioner Martin Anderson for assistance) five (5) months of investigation and state support through grievances, Loudermill and arbitration
- Incalculable state resources from the State Offices of Ethics, Public Accounts, DAS Smart unit, Human Resources, OLR, DOL Appeals unit, and subcontractor for representation at DOL appeal hearings (3 days which ended a loss to the state)

The costs keep mounting. She is not stopping. The failure to respond in a timely fashion has also left the state open to possible future liabilities. In fact, they are currently being investigated by the US Dept. of Labor and there is an ongoing

whistleblower lawsuit at CHRO. Two African American employees filed discrimination lawsuits at CHRO but were forced to drop them to get stipulated agreements because they could not continue the fight for health reasons.

To date, a rough estimate of the wasted state resources used to fortify their commitment to fire me, alone, total approximately \$350,000 dollars in wasted resources. And when I am reinstated, the cost to the state will be an additional \$200,000 in back pay and benefits and settlement of legal costs in the amount of \$50,000 through a different forum. **In essence, the state is nearing the half million dollar mark to harm one former employee.** There are two (2) more employees in the arbitration pipeline. The abuse of good hearted employees is unacceptable especially by someone that holds themselves out as an advocate for the state of Connecticut.

Only two of many were able to offer spoken testimony today. I am very proud of their courage. But there are many who could not speak because they fear retaliation. We all just want our lives to go back to what they were before we worked there. Many just want peace and distance from what we experienced or were forced to witness. Our past attempts to bring attention to this issue have landed on deaf ears, but we will not be silenced.

We are grateful for the opportunity to support the development and implementation of this this Bill. As a group, we would ask the Committee or members of the Committee to provide all of us an opportunity to address these issues with you in a more private setting where some will be offered to maintain anonymity. We would forever be grateful.

I know it's hard to believe that such an incredible advocate could be such a brutal bully to a very devoted staff. There are days I am still in disbelief especially since before I worked there she was a dear friend and fellow advocate. It is indeed difficult.

My biggest regret is that this has taken away real time with my daughter that I can never get back. I have burdened my ailing 80 year mother who has watched me struggle for two years to just "hold on". My retirement savings are gone. My health has suffered tremendously. Multiply all of that times the 7 other employees who either directly experienced the same or had to silently witness their peers endure it, one after the other.

When does it end? What will it take to make it stop? Enough already. The costs to the state and their devoted employees are unmeasurable and they continue on.

Please support this bill 1035.

Anonymous, but just for now