



Testimony Planning and Development Committee

2/13/15

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 opposes Proposed H.B. No. 5886 AN ACT PROHIBITING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES FROM SERVING ON CERTAIN MUNICIPAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES.

This bill restricts municipal employees from serving on municipal councils or boards of finance. We believe that the current system for electing council and board candidates has worked quite well and there is no need for this change.

Public employees have a right, some might argue that along with all citizens a duty, to serve in municipal government. This right should not be infringed upon. A lament heard in most towns is that there are not enough citizens willing to step forward to run for or serve in office. This bill will make that situation worse in further suppressing the candidate pool.

There is much vilification of public employees these days. Our members are targets of convenience for corporate executives who seem eager to find a scapegoat to blame our society's economic inequality upon. A largely corporate owned news media feeds on these attacks, dare that we actually look at what has causes our country's vast economic inequality. Indeed, conservative activists seem to blame all of society's woes on public employees. This bill seems to go along with that sentiment.

The argument for this bill is that public employees have some overwhelming conflict of interest. Yet, unionized workers of a municipality are members of a class. Their wage is set by contract, not on an individual basis. Public employee pay is wide open to scrutiny and examination. That should alleviate the concern of any inherent conflict of interest.

If you are to pass this bill, would it not achieve more balance if it also excludes from council or board service any employee or principle of a business selling any goods or services to their municipality of residence? Should not employees of phone companies, insurers, electric providers and other businesses be excluded? Might not one argue that since they too are being paid by the municipality that they have a conflict of interest?

When municipal employees run for office it is known, if not trumpeted loudly by their opponents in a race. If voters think that it is wrong to elect a municipal employee, surely they will not elect him or her. Perhaps, we are all better off if we trust in democracy and the system that has yielded fairly good municipal results for our state over many decades.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.