

Human Services Committee

March 8, 2016

Senate Bill 391: An Act Concerning the Recoupment of State Costs Attributable to Low Wage Employers

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Ranking Members, and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Helene Figueroa and I am the director of the Family Child Care Team at CSEA SEIU Local 2001. I offer the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 391: An Act Concerning the Recoupment of State Costs Attributable to Low Wage Employers.

I do not agree with the Governor, nor with the leadership in the House and Senate regarding their dismissal of any revenue proposals during this session. We cannot simply accept the economy as it is, with income disparity growing daily. Public policies of the past 20-30 years have gotten us into this mess, and public policies will get us out of it. We cannot continue to accept the fact that big multi-national corporations (not our small or large local businesses) and the extremely wealthy (not the mere millionaires) have more of a say in our governance than the average working person. That is not a democracy it is an oligarchy. This growing trend is what keeps me up at night and why I support this bill.

I have made a career advocating for better quality early care and education that is affordable to all Americans. That's rather a difficult task when you have international corporations using a business model that creates tremendous wealth for overpaid executives while their workers' wages are so low that they must rely on government subsidies to help feed their families and get medical help. Adding salt to the wound, these same corporations continuously call for smaller government, and the dismantling of safety nets for the poor. This is wrong and not in keeping with our democratic values.

Forcing these bad actor companies to pony up a fee for every employee that is not paid a living wage for a hard day's work is only fair. What happened to the common good? Applying those fees to critical social needs such as higher quality child care for all struggling working families would lift many boats.

It is irresponsible to take revenue off the table. I expect more from the legislature! I do believe the bill would be strengthened by making it clear that we have no intention of levying such fees on locally owned and run businesses that are not part of a conglomerate of franchises. The grocery store chain in Eastern Connecticut, the local jewelry store, the small manufacturer in Cheshire and the independent child care center are not in the same category. They are victims of this new economy just like the rest of us.

Face it, our children are growing up with lower expectations than we did. What can they expect for their futures? We have the responsibility and you have the power to change the current trends that are destroying our democracy. This fee on big businesses that can't see their cheap labor practices as destructive to the American family is but one small step that should be taken today. Please have the courage to support SB 391.

Helene Figueroa
Director, Family Child Care Team
CSEA SEIU Local 2001