

Companions & Homemakers, Inc.
Testimony Concerning Proposed Bill No. 5237
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 3, 2016

Good afternoon members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Jonathan Hunt, and I am the Director of Communications for Companions & Homemakers, Inc., a non-medical home-care agency serving the elderly population of Connecticut. I am here today to testify in opposition of proposed bill no. 5237, 'An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment,' and its application to employers in the home-care industry.

Our client's and their families choose home-care as a means to remain within their own homes and maintain their familiar routines. As a home-care provider, Companions & Homemakers serves a vulnerable population of elderly and disabled individuals who are more susceptible to fraud, abuse and neglect. These settings provide ample opportunity for individuals with less than honest intentions to have access to prescription narcotics, and valuables such as jewelry, cash/checkbooks, etc.

Our clients specifically choose our company, and like-agencies within the industry, for the protections offered, such as thorough employee screening and the completion of a comprehensive background check on all candidates for employment, as well as bonding for dishonesty, theft and damages.

Connecticut statute currently requires home-care agencies to perform a comprehensive background check, and to do so prior to extending an offer of employment. Proposed bill 5237 would require that a background check not be performed until a conditional offer of employment was being made to an employee. However, based on the current Connecticut statute, home-care employers cannot make any offer of employment, conditional or otherwise, until a background check is completed; a conflict with state law and policy. I feel confident in my assumption that no one in this room would contract an agency that knowingly sends an employee with a criminal record of elder abuse to work in their grandmother's home; Or an employee with a history of illegal sale of prescription narcotics to a patient's home where these medications are readily accessible.

I respectfully request the Labor Committee reject House Bill 5237, or at minimum, exempt homemaker-companion agencies from its application. This proposed bill allows for exemptions to other professions, such as law enforcement, as well as other professionals who have access to client funds and personal information. The same exemption should be applied to individuals in a home-care setting where direct oversight is much less, opportunity for abuse and/or fraud is much higher, and the screening process for employment candidacy should be much more thorough.

I thank you for your time, and welcome any questions.