SENATOR CARLO LEONE
Deputy President Pro Tempore

Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106-1591
Tel. 860-240-0589
Toll-free 1-800-842-1420
www.SenatorLeone.cga.ct.gov

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General Bonding Subcommittee
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Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee
Transportation Committee

Testimony by:
Senator Carlo Leone- 27th District
March 8, 2016
SB 343: An Act Concerning Domestic Workers

Chairman Gomes, Chairman Tercyak, honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I appear before you today regarding SB 343: An Act Concerning Domestic Workers.

First off, I wish to congratulate the Committee for your diligent and dedicated efforts to address the safety and well-being of domestic workers. Too often our society has not known or has turned a blind eye to the too frequent abuses these workers endure. You have not and you deserve credit.

My concern with SB 343 is not its intent but rather its reach. In one area I believe this reach is unnecessarily broad. Decades ago our federal government determined that it would be good for America and would foster greater appreciation of American values if cultural exchange programs were encouraged, I believe that goal is even more important today. Too often conflicts abroad and indeed here in the United States have their roots in ignorance of the culture and customs of others.

One such cultural exchange program involves au pairs, young people from other countries who come to America to learn our society and to share the values of theirs. One of the largest au pair programs, Au Pairs in America, is located in my district and oversees some 350 Connecticut au pairs and employs 170 Stamford area residents.

Carefully regulated by the US Department of State, au pairs are young people here in America for one but not more than two years. While here they live with local families, assist with the care of children and learn American values and traditions. They share with their host families the values and traditions of their home countries.

The host families in turn provide au pairs with private living quarters, a stipend and much more such as health insurance, vacation, use of an automobile, funds for educational programs here in the US and more. To insure the au pairs' well-being they have 24/7 access to Au Pairs in America and are contacted monthly to assess their satisfaction. Moreover, the State Department audits compliance with its rules and regulations.

These au pairs are not the domestic workers we have heard about who live in the shadows of society and endure sub-human conditions and treatment that SB 343 seeks to address. They are instead well supervised visible, vibrant young people who are here for a short time to learn from and to teach us. Their well-being is regulated by our federal government and enforced by Au Pairs in America.

I urge the Committee to exclude au pairs in the State Department's J-1 visa program from the provisions of SB 343.

Thank you.