

**Comments by Eric Parker**  
**Morning Anchor/Chief Investigative Reporter, WFSB**

*Joint Committee on the Judiciary*  
*March 27, 2017*

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong and members of this Honorable Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak briefly on Raised Bill 981.

My name is Eric Parker and I am the Morning Anchor and Chief Investigative Reporter at WFSB Channel 3. I have worked for the station since 2004. And while it's not why I'm here today, I'm also an attorney in private practice at Romano Parker and Associates in Rocky Hill.

I've been asked to speak on Raised Bill 981 by the Connecticut Broadcasters Association because I've become very familiar with the type of harassing lawsuit this bill is designed to stop.

As you no doubt know by now this is an anti-SLAPP proposal, S-L-A-P-P is an acronym standing for Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation, and anti-SLAPP provisions like these are designed to restrict malicious litigation that aims to chill free speech.

But what does that mean in the real world?

In 2004, I reported live from the scene of a raid by Federal agents. It was an assignment for a few hours, and by the time our morning news program was over at 7am, I was on to my next story. I didn't think much of it.

But months later a summons arrived. We were being sued. The Plaintiff's address was a prison.

A young reporter, I was shaken. I poured back over my notes trying to figure out if I had gotten something wrong.

Then a letter showed up in the newsroom. The Plaintiff wrote us essentially admitting that the lawsuit was without merit and offering to drop it in exchange for \$500. Despite being convicted, he had sued every reporter and every media outlet who was there.

Unlike some of those who got the letter, to the credit of my bosses, they didn't pay. Instead of taking the cheap and easy way out, they decided to beat him fair and square in court.

He obviously knew what he was doing. He filed motions to delay the proceedings, fought the station's discovery requests, and made his claims vague enough that it was difficult to definitively prove they were false. We eventually won – but it took more than a year and cost tens of thousands of dollars.

And that's not the only example I can personally give. I'm involved in a case that's pending right now that's dragged on since December of 2013. We'll win that one too, but that case has been so fraught with intentional delays by the Plaintiff that we've spent many times as much in attorneys' fees, and it's still not over.

This is why Raised Bill 981 is so important. It gives defendants a way to short circuit litigation that's merely designed to threaten, intimidate and harass.

It sets up a clear test: If the complaint shows a bare minimum of validity, it moves forward, but if it does not, the Defendant can end the litigation quickly and without the months of delays and the expenses that come along with it.

It doesn't mean valid lawsuits can't be prosecuted. Those claims do exist and those Plaintiffs deserve every ounce of the rights afforded by the full civil court process.

But when a lawsuit aims to silence free speech on a matter of public concern, this bill establishes a Special Motion to Dismiss, freezes Discovery, and provides a mechanism for the Defendant to seek reimbursement for attorneys' fees if they prevail.

For a Plaintiff with a legitimate claim, that shouldn't stop them from filing with the Court. But for a Plaintiff who knows the facts simply don't support their Complaint, it may make them think twice about whether they should start the case in the first place.

This would be a powerful change providing protection from frivolous litigation. I understand how rare it is for bills to become law in the session they're first proposed, but I believe this is the type of measure that deserves that consideration. It protects Free Speech, Constitutional Rights, and may have the side effect of reducing the burden of frivolous cases on the Courts.

I urge this honorable Committee to give it support.