

170324 Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

Representative Walker, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, and the rest of the committee...

My name is Chris DeFrancesco and I come before you today as a working citizen of Connecticut.

I live in Newington and am a product of the public school system in town. My daughter thrives in that same school system today.

My wife and I both work, and volunteer in our community.

We pay our taxes and do our best to raise our daughter right.

We have built relationships within our neighborhoods, our school, our church, and our town's children's theater.

We are productive members of society who love our community and try to make it a better place.

We contribute to the success of our community by supporting local business and organizations.

And we're not unique.

In fact, there's nothing all that extraordinary about my story.

And that is my point today.

Connecticut has many, many working middle-class families just like mine.

They work. They volunteer. They support their local economies and strive to make their communities better.

They pay their taxes and do their best to raise their children right.

These working middle-class families exist in **both** the public and private sectors.

I happen to be a state employee, at UConn Health.

I'm here today because before you are dozens of bills, many of which, in some form, would harm working people.

HOUSE BILLS 5552, 5838, 6093... SENATE BILLS 368, 537... Too many to list here, but no need.

Plenty of union folks are here to tell you why you should oppose them.

You get the big picture idea though. These are attacks on collective bargaining rights.

My message is this: An attack on public employees' collective bargaining rights is an attack on all working people.

Move Connecticut toward a right to work state and you will lower the standards for wages and benefits for working people everywhere.

At a time when it's crucial to grow the working middle class—or even simply maintain it—weakening collective bargaining rights runs the risk of doing exactly the opposite.

It's easy to blame public employees for the state's budget ills.

But I ask that you carefully consider the consequences, perhaps unintended, of extracting a pound of flesh from them, as tempting and politically popular as that may seem today.

Certainly there are some reasonable steps that can be taken that don't **destroy** collective bargaining and turn us into Wisconsin, some of them perhaps even before you today.

If you already have your mind made up about state employee unions, I have no illusions I can change it.

There's no shortage of information out there about how state employees provide crucial services to some of the most vulnerable among us.

What I fear there is a shortage of, is this realization:

When you compare **state employee** families to **private sector middle-class** working families, I bet you'd find they have more in common than they have differences.

This divisiveness is a distraction. We are better than this.

Public or private sector, we work, are invested in our communities, pay our taxes, and try to raise our kids right.

By advancing bills that will harm state employees, you will harm working people all over Connecticut... public and private, union and nonunion.

Those who want to weaken our collective bargaining rights should be careful what they wish for.

Thank you for listening, and for your leadership.