

February 21, 2017

Testimony in Opposition of SB 596 – An Act Concerning the Definition of
Managerial Employee
And
SB 5552 – An Act Excluding Retirement Benefits From Collective Bargaining by State
and Municipal Employees

Senator Gomes, Senator Miner, Representative Porter, Senator McLachlan, Senator Osten, Representative Paolillo, Representative Bocchino, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

Good evening Madam/Mister Chairperson, my name is Lindsay DiStefano, Associate Professor/Clinical Coordinator in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Connecticut.

I am here to testify in opposition of both SB 596 – An Act Concerning the Definition of Managerial Employees and SB 5552 – An Act Excluding Retirement Benefits From Collective Bargaining by State and Municipal Employees.

As a faculty member at the University, I am concerned about the possible complications a Bill to remove and/or limit the collective bargaining rights of faculty would have at the University. The relationship between the administration and faculty has enabled a partnership for shared governance and academic freedom. Faculty are allowed to use expertise in their fields to ensure that the highest quality of education is provided to the students of Connecticut.

The higher education universities of the state of Connecticut are respected and known throughout the country. Their reputation, specifically that of UCONN, is stronger than its ever been. As a native of Ohio, I have lived and worked at universities in Massachusetts and North Carolina. I also have close friends at universities in nearly every state in our country. Our loved ones often question how long we will live in Connecticut. But we love it here and believe in a strong future for the state and for the universities.

That said, competition to recruit and retain the highest quality faculty is intense. The state of Connecticut has a high cost of living, but we have been able to recruit and retain many faculty by the collective bargaining possible and the apparent support the state has for faculty and the university system. This shared governance and academic freedom is highly respected and provides a sense of stability and support that can overcome other concerns. For example, 3 years ago I turned down an attractive job offer at a prestigious university because the strong retirement benefits at UCONN were significantly higher than the salary increase that I was offered at the other university. Plus, I felt I was valued in the state of CT and would not experience that same level of shared mission elsewhere. This value would

immediately decline if either of these proposed bills pass and can negatively impact the state for years to come.

Our state of CT is in desperate need of pride and unity. Removing or limiting collective bargaining of state employees is the opposite direction for the state's needs. We need to come together and promote the state's investment and interest in state employees and the success of our universities. This pride and unity will promote economic growth by keeping people in the state and recruiting new transplants.

We have seen the consequences of non-collective bargaining higher education institutions where the decisions are made on the bottom line, not what is in the best interest of the students. Institutions that base their decisions on the bottom line hire per course faculty who teach one or two courses per semester with little or no job security. They have to hustle from one institution to another institution to earn a living wage. I can promise you these faculty are not providing students with pride in their university or their state, and almost certainly are only delivering the bare minimum of their efforts.

In Ohio, nearly three-quarters of faculty at institutions of higher education are employed on a part-time or contingent basis. They are highly educated, hard working and have been denied their right to bargaining collectively. Their job security and employment protections prevent them from investing their full attention to providing the best quality education for their student's.

At the University of Connecticut, state statute allows for contingent faculty to bargaining collectively. They have secured opportunities for multi-year contracts, retirement benefits, and health insurance that allows for full-time attention to their students. These opportunities are invaluable sources of support, that go beyond salary. Salaries have been frozen recently many years, and faculty could make much more money leaving academia altogether. However, we are dedicated to the university and to our students. Disrupting the collective bargaining arrangement would hurt the education environment for our students and severely, negatively impact the perceptions of the relationship between the state and university faculty.

I therefore oppose expanding the definition of a managerial employee to potentially include faculty at institutions of higher education and I oppose an act to exclude retirement benefits from collective bargaining.