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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

GARY CASTEEL, Secretary-Treasurer

March 8, 2018 Public Hearing
Labor Committee
Testimony Presented by Julie Kushner, Director, UAW Region 9A

Testimony in SUPPORT of:

- S.B. No. 1 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING EARNED FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE.
- H.B. No. 5387 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE.
- S.B. No. 15 AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR AND EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK.
- H.B. No. 5386 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS PAY EQUITY AND FAIRNESS MATTERS.
- H.B. No. 5043 AN ACT PROMOTING A FAIR, CIVIL AND HARASSMENT-FREE WORKPLACE.
- H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR TREATMENT OF SICK WORKERS.
- H.B. No. 5388 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A FAIR MINIMUM WAGE.

Dear Senator Gomes, Senator Miner, Representative Porter, Vice-Chairs and Members of the Labor Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

Good afternoon and Happy Women's Day. Thank you for holding this hearing on these crucial bills.

My name is Julie Kushner and I live in Danbury, Connecticut. I am the UAW Region 9A Director, which represents over 8,000 active and retired United Auto Workers members living and working in Connecticut. I am here to express my support for several bills.

These issues before the committee are all at the core of how I became involved in the fight for rights for working people. I worked as a secretary while still in college and quickly learned that the women I worked with weren't getting a fair deal. We were paid much less than men, even though we worked just as hard, and had just as many bills to pay. The women I worked with struggled to pay for basic family needs, like paying for rent, childcare, and healthcare. Of the many problems faced by the secretaries I helped to organize, sexual harassment was among the worst, and these women had no way to report the problem without seemingly being punished in the process. Complaining about sexual harassment often led to inaction by the employer and a hostile workplace and retaliation going forward.

In the forty years since then, we've made real progress for workers and we've won some important improvements for workers in the UAW. But I am frustrated at how far we still have to go on all these issues, and I am here to demand real solutions to these problems. This legislative body has the power to fix these problems and dramatically improve the life of Connecticut workers.

\$15 Minimum Wage

Organizing child care workers was my first experience with minimum-wage earners. Teacher aides entrusted with the care of infants and the education of preschoolers were paid less than the janitors

cleaning the office buildings in Stamford. Most of these workers supported and cared for their own families. I visited these women in their homes — small apartments, crowded and living in poverty. They struggled to feed their children, they rode buses to work, walked in inclement weather and suffered without basic comforts. When we won our first contract the raises made a real difference in their daily lives.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

The need for paid family and medical leave is just a reality of the times we live in. No one should be worried about their income or job loss when they are caring for a new baby, a seriously sick family member, or themselves. FMLA, which was passed decades ago, is unrealistic for too many workers who cannot afford to lose pay, and inaccessible for 40% of the workforce who works for a smaller employer.

Connecticut finds itself at a competitive disadvantage as long as we do not pass and implement a universal, sustainable program as is proposed in SB1 and HB5387 because our neighbors in New York State, Rhode Island, and New Jersey already provide this security and Massachusetts is contemplating it now. This is especially pronounced in communities like my home of Danbury, where moving just a few miles over the border means significantly more security and opportunity for people thinking about starting a family or worried about caring for aging parents.

Paid Sick Days

Similarly, Connecticut has fallen behind on its protections for workers who need a few days of paid sick time every year for medical care and minor illnesses. HB5044 would bring our standard more in line with our neighboring states and cities. Our paid sick days law, passed here in Connecticut in 2011, has been a success. Tens of thousands of workers have been able to use a little time when they need to recover or get medical treatment without losing pay or their jobs, and the sectors of Connecticut's economy affected by the law have seen steady growth.

Now over 40 jurisdictions, including 7 other states, have paid sick days standards and ours is by far the weakest with the most unjustifiable exemptions and carve-outs. Let's pass HB5044 to catch up.

Pay Equity

This is pretty basic common sense. In Connecticut, women are paid on average 83¢ to every dollar paid to their white male counterpart for the same work. It gets worse — African American women are paid only 59¢ and Latinas are paid an astounding 48¢ to every dollar paid to white men performing the same work. Annually, Connecticut women who work full time lost approximately \$5.5 billion in pay¹, which could be supporting their families and being spent in our local economy. Paying two people different amounts for the same work is unjustifiable, as is using a worker's past salary information as an excuse to pay her less.

Paying women less was wrong when I was working as a secretary 40 years ago, and it is wrong today. HB5386 as it is currently written is a meaningful step towards treating women workers fairly, and it is far too long overdue.

¹ <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/4-2016-ct-wage-gap.pdf>

Harassment-Free Workplaces

Finally, the right to work in an environment free of sexual harassment should be a right recognized, fostered and protected entirely by the State of Connecticut. Just a few years ago, I had the privilege of working with the graduate teaching and research assistants at the University of Connecticut in their negotiations for their first union contract. Soon after the contract was ratified by this legislature, a young research assistant came to the union for help. She had been fired for resisting the advances of her principal investigator. Without a job, and without a principal investigator her years of study and hard work were going to abruptly end. She was desperate for help. Through the grievance procedure she was reinstated, she was assigned to a new lab and a new dissertation advisor. The career she had pursued at great cost and with great sacrifice was back on track. This worker was "lucky" she had a union to fight to protect her. This right should be afforded every worker in Connecticut.

The revelations of the "Me too" movement make clear that every woman has faced harassment at some level during her life — that means every woman on this committee and for the men, it's your wives, sisters, mothers and daughters. The non-discrimination laws on the books don't go far enough. Now is the time to act — now is the time to demonstrate, especially to the young women just entering the workforce, sexual harassment will not be tolerated, and if you report harassment you will be protected.

I hope this committee and this legislature will pass these policies this year. We cannot endure another year of obstruction for fair pay, paid family and sick leave, or harassment in the workplace. We need to make Connecticut a great place to live and to work and to raise our families.

Thank you for your consideration.

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