



# Operating Engineers Continuing Political Committee

International Union  
of Operating Engineers  
Local 478

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Dear Chairpersons and Members of the Legislative Committees,

My name is Nate Brown, and I'm submitting written testimony today on behalf of the Operating Engineers Local 478 an organization that represents 3000 heavy equipment operators and support staff throughout Connecticut. I am here today to testify in **opposition** for Report of the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth for the reason that recommends Prevailing wage laws should be further amended to permit use of non-union labor on rehabilitation projects costing less than \$1 million, replicating the change made for new construction in 2017.

The commission mentions to permit the use of non-union labor on rehabilitation projects. Prevailing wage does not force using union labor on a municipality project. Prevailing wage is an area standard wage set by the government that both **union** and **non-union** contractors use to bid on publicly financed construction projects.

Prevailing wage is the instrument by which the over 80,000 Connecticut citizens that work in construction sustain and grow the standard of living for themselves, their families, and their communities. It puts money in the pockets of all Connecticut construction workers, union and non-union. It does that by discouraging predatory contractors from importing and exploiting low wage workers from other regions to benefit from Connecticut taxpayer dollars spent on public construction. Prevailing wage makes a critical contribution to the economy of our state and its municipalities. It allows taxpaying construction workers to work just one job, allows them to have the time to coach their children in Little League, allows them to afford health care, and at the end of their working career, to retire with dignity. Their wages represent mortgage and tuition payments, purchases at local supermarkets and hardware stores, and to donate their time and money to churches, schools, and charities and other good works. These wages help drive the state's economy and add to the state and local tax base, which ensures that future state and local construction projects will continue to be built. The claim by opponents that an increase of the prevailing wage thresholds would save up to 30 percent on public projects is factually contradicted in study after study, across the United States.

Weakening the prevailing wage law invites the growth of employers who offer neither medical coverage, nor pension benefits, thereby exacerbating the Connecticut's growing uninsured worker and retirement savings challenges. Undermining the prevailing wage law also jeopardizes the future of training and apprentice programs, which are critical to contractors seeking skilled workers who have the experience to complete a quality job, on time and on budget.

Opponents of prevailing wage won't tell you that changing the law will result in cutthroat competitiveness in contracting; increased workforce turnover; and the entry into our local markets of large of out-of-state contractors bringing in a low paid, lower skilled workforce.

States that have chosen to eliminate or increase the thresholds of their prevailing wage law have seen lower construction wages – along with a tripling of cost overruns on public works projects, an increase in construction injuries, and a larger decline in minority apprenticeship training. Those impacts are all part of the true cost equation of the State’s prevailing wage law.

Times change and so do the needs and economic realities of our state. However, the far reaching benefits the prevailing wage remains on continuing source of strength for the state of Connecticut, our municipalities, and the hardworking residents who call Connecticut home.

At a time when the economies and quality of life for communities across the state are being challenged, we urge you to resist attempts to compromise one of the key sources of economic stability and quality of life for our citizens, our communities and our state – the prevailing wage law. We urge the commission to carefully examine the true cost equations of the state’s prevailing wage law.