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United for Quality Care

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David Pickus, President, SEIU 1199NE  
**Regarding the recommendations of  
Fiscal Commission**

Good afternoon, members of the Appropriations, Commerce, Finance and Planning and Development Committees. My name is David Pickus and I am the President of District 1199 SEIU New England, which represents 26,000 health care workers in Connecticut.

Last fall, a provision in the final budget, passed quickly with little public scrutiny, created this Commission, effectively privatizing major responsibilities of legislative process in Connecticut. It is hardly surprising then, that this Commission recommends privatizing everything else and puts the blame for Connecticut's budgetary woes on public sector worker pensions. They want us to follow them down the low road to ostensible economic growth, enriching large corporations and irresponsibly demonizing public sector workers while doing very little to help most state citizens.

There is much here that should alarm Connecticut residents, especially the lack of transparency and accountability, but my focus today is on two major problems: the unreasonable reliance on privatization without proper funding as a miracle solution to all fiscal ills and the overall aim to starve these private sector workers and pit them against public sector workers to bring down quality of life for workers in Connecticut. Rather than trying to compete in a race to the bottom as the Commission on Fiscal Stability's plan would do, it makes more sense to focus on building an economy that works for everyone.

The report's fundamental premise is that Connecticut needs to be more like states that have low-road economic development policies like Texas, North Carolina, and Florida, where every conceivable quality of life indicator is worse than we enjoy here. These states are demonstrably lacking in education quality, health care, infrastructure and overall quality of life measures. Despite some justifiable critiques, Connecticut is a pretty good place to live. To make it better, we should be emulating states with better indicators, like Massachusetts, New York and Minnesota that are following the high road to economic growth.

As others have testified, we have a Commission of corporate executives funding a secret group of consultants to make legislative recommendations, including privatizing "land, buildings, airports, roads, healthcare, facilities and other assets that the state does not need to own and which may have valuable development potential." More specifically, it recommends the wholesale privatization of social services, which it sees as a cost saver because of the complete lack of funding that is given these sectors of industry.

My union represents workers who provide those services, so we know firsthand that privatizing them and then not funding them results in high turnover, broken continuity of care and a low-wage workforce reliant on public supports hidden in other sections of the budget. A true analysis of savings from privatization would show costs to the state to make up for low salaries to workers and other ancillary impacts of maintaining a low wage workforce.

Public decision-making and resources must remain transparent and accountable. Connecticut needs to look to high-road growth ideas that help everyone. We could improve the taxation system to make it more stable and fair, improve wages and benefits for workers and their families, improve our infrastructure, and implement good governance tools to help us develop more sophisticated policies. Reject the recommendations put forth by a commission of the one percent. We can do whatever corporate leaders want us to do and worry about how these policies affect shareholders, or we can worry about the true stakeholders in Connecticut's future – its citizens.