



Testimony of Juan Hernandez
District Director and Vice President 32BJ SEIU

Labor & Public Employees Committee
March 7, 2019

SB 2 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage/HB 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage

SB 764 An Act Prohibiting "On-Call" Shift Scheduling
SB 990 An Act Concerning Call Centers and Notice of Closure
HB 7224 An Act Concerning Para-Educator Pay Equity

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

HÉCTOR J. FIGUEROA
President

LARRY ENGELSTEIN
Executive Vice President

KYLE BRAGG
Secretary Treasurer

LENORE FRIEDLAENDER
Assistant to the President

VICE PRESIDENTS

SHIRLEY ALDEBOL

KEVIN BROWN

JAIME CONTRERAS

JUAN HERNANDEZ

ROB HILL

ALISON HIRSH

DENIS JOHNSTON

GABE MORGAN

MANNY PASTREICH

ROXANA RIVERA

JOHN SANTOS

JOHN THACKER

Capital Area District

Washington 202.387.3211

Baltimore 410.244.6299

Virginia 202.387.3211

Connecticut District

Hartford 860.560.8674

Stamford 203.674.9965

District 1201

215.923.5488

Florida District

305.672.7071

Hudson Valley District

914.328.3492

Mid-Atlantic District

215.226.3600

National Conference of

Firemen and Oilers

606.324.3445

New England District 615

617.523.6150

New Jersey District

973.824.3225

Western Pennsylvania District

412.471.0690

www.seiu32bj.org

Thank you to the Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and the members of the Connecticut Labor and Public Employees Committee for holding today's hearing. My name is Juan Hernandez and I am the Connecticut State Director of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the state of Connecticut and 163,000 members up and down the East Coast. Our members form the backbone of the property industry – building workers, security officers; and office, school, theatre, stadium and window cleaners. With our dedicated members, we fight to make life better for all working families in our state and strive for communities where all people are treated with fundamental dignity and respect.

I'm here today on behalf of our members to urge you to pass SB 2/HB5004; SB 764; SB 990; and HB 7224. When passed, these bills will further worker's rights and ability to earn a real livable wage and ultimately strengthen our state's working and middle class families. Connecticut is among the states with the highest income inequality in the Country -- the top 5% of our state's households hold an average income 17 times as large as the bottom 20% of households.ⁱ Although childhood poverty in Connecticut is lower than the national average, the childhood poverty rate in some of our state's urban areas is double the statewide average.ⁱⁱ Moreover, racial disparities in childhood poverty in Connecticut are much higher than the national average.ⁱⁱⁱ Through these pieces of legislation, we can begin to address the inequality and disparities that exists in our state and ensure that families have the wages and the workplace rights they need in order to thrive.

SB 2 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage/HB 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage

First, I want to raise my voice in support of SB 2/ HB 5004 which will raise Connecticut's minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2022.

According to the Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator, a single person living in the Hartford/West Hartford/East Hartford metro area needs to make \$37,686 a year or \$13.36/hour in order to attain a "modest yet adequate standard or living." A family of four, on the other hand, would need to make \$90,244 to live by the same standard.^{iv} The current minimum wage of \$10.10/hour is simply not enough for anyone to live on. Clearly \$15/hour would not mean a life of luxury; it is simply a better chance at a more secure and stable life for Connecticut residents.

The hard working men and women that we represent at our union have won – through organizing and bargaining – wages over \$15 an hour. These wages in combination with robust benefits packages have meant that our members can raise families, own homes, and send their

children to college. We want all working people in Connecticut to be able to access the middle-class lives that our members have access to as well.

We have the privilege of representing workers in localities up and down the East Coast. Given our perspective we know that raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour is good public policy and should be replicated here in our state. Over a dozen jurisdictions have raised the wage to \$15 an hour since 2013, and at the state level, California, New York, and recently New Jersey have passed \$15 minimum wage laws.

The momentum is growing—working people are calling for equity and it is our responsibility to answer that call. Please stand with low-wage workers in our State and support a statewide \$15 minimum wage.

SB 764 An Act Prohibiting “On-Call” Shift Scheduling

We also stand in support of SB 764, An Act to Prohibit “On-Call” Shift Scheduling.

Since the recession, Connecticut’s recovery has been concentrated in lower wage industries.^v Because of this, we need to pay particular attention to the reality of what it means to be a low wage worker. Currently, hourly workers who work “on call,” many in low-wage jobs, are forced to keep erratic and unpredictable schedules. If a parent does not know their schedule until the day of a shift, how can they plan a doctor’s appointment for their kid? How can they secure childcare? How can they budget for their families bills when they do not know how much pay they can count on from week to week? In our state, 256,000 hourly workers are parents of children below the age of 18.^{vi} Living precariously is stressful for workers and it takes its toll on children and families. Lack of stability undermines the health and the well-being of caretakers which impacts the children they are raising.

Additionally, 77% of Connecticut’s Latino workforce works hourly and 76% of Black workforce works hourly.^{vii} We cannot turn our back on working families of color. This bill will help stabilize working families, in particular working families of color, and support their growth and ability to create a healthier and stronger family and more viable path to the middle class.

On the East Coast, New York City and Washington D.C. legislators are giving workers the stability they need to better plan their lives and be able to earn family sustaining wages. At 32BJ, we represent members in these cities and we have stood side-by-side with other low-wage workers as they’ve fought to win fairer scheduling laws in their cities. Here in Connecticut, we must do the same and pass SB 764 out of Committee today.

SB 990 An Act Concerning Call Centers and Notice of Closure

I’m also here today to lend our support to SB 990, An Act Concerning Call Centers and Notice of Closure. According to the labor union, Communication Workers of America (CWA), right here in Connecticut, AT&T is closing three call centers and laying off about 90 workers (unless the workers relocated to Tennessee or Georgia).^{viii} AT&T call center jobs have provided an important source of economic growth in dozens of American communities, including many reeling from the loss of manufacturing jobs. But when these services are outsourced to low-wage contractors in overseas countries, communities lose yet another large pool of family-supporting jobs.

When passed, this bill will create accountability in the off-shoring process and protection for workers. If passed, SB 990, will require a call center employer to notify the Commissioner of Labor if they plan to relocate a call center or one or more facilities or operating units within a call center comprising not less than thirty per cent of the call center's or operating unit's total call volume. Subsequently, these call center employers will be ineligible for any direct or indirect state grants, state guaranteed loans, state tax benefits or other state financial support for a period of five years.

It's time companies like AT&T again started putting American workers first. SB 990 would be good for Connecticut workers and consumers and ensure that taxpayer dollars and grants don't go into the pockets of companies that offshore good American jobs from our state.

HB 7224 An Act Concerning Paraeducator Pay Equity

Lastly, we ask that you support HB 7224, An Act Concerning Para-Educator Pay Equity. Currently, there are no statewide pay standards for Paraeducators and compensation varies from school district to school district. This bill, when passed, will require the State Department of Education to perform regular evaluations of the compensation plans for certain Board of Education Employees, including Paraeducators. This evidence will then be presented to arbitrators in contract negotiations.

Paraeducators are hard-working and dedicated professionals who serve our state's children dutifully. We need to do what we can to support decent pay and strong contracts for them.

Again, thank you to the Connecticut Labor and Public Employees Committee for the opportunity to testify here today. We ask that you stand with our state's working families by passing SB 2/HB5004; SB 764; SB 990; and HB 7224 out of committee today!

ⁱ "Income Inequality in Connecticut: A Snapshot," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Accessed at: <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/12-15-16sfp-factsheet-connecticut.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Supporting children and families: creating opportunity for all: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/Chapter%201%20-%20final.pdf> (page 2)

ⁱⁱⁱ "Reductions in Poverty, Uninsurance at Risk due to New Budget," Ray Noonan and Karen Siegel. Accessed at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/Census%20brief%20FINAL.pdf> (page 4)

^{iv} Economic Policy Institute. Family Budget Calculator for Hartford/West Hartford/East Hartford metro area. Accessed at: <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>

^v "The Connecticut Economy," Manisha Srivastava. Connecticut Office of Policy Management. Accessed at: https://www.cga.ct.gov/fin/tfs/20140929_State%20Tax%20Panel/20150916/CT%20Economy,%20Srivastava.pdf

^{vi} "Data Brief: Hourly Work and Workers in Connecticut," the Center for Popular Democracy. Accessed at: <http://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Hourly%20Work%20and%20Workers%20in%20CT.pdf>

^{vii} "Data Brief: Hourly Work and Workers in Connecticut," the Center for Popular Democracy. Accessed at: <http://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Hourly%20Work%20and%20Workers%20in%20CT.pdf>

^{viii} "AT&T to relocate Meriden offices; 89 job cuts slated," HartfordBusiness.com. Accessed at: <http://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/20190225/NEWS01/190229951>