Good afternoon Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, My name is David Glidden, and I am the Executive Director of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a labor union representing over 25,000 members across Connecticut. I come before you today in opposition to Senate Bill 269, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION OF INDEPENDENT INSPECTORS AND INSPECTION FIRMS TO PERFORM ELEVATOR, ESCALATOR AND STATE BUILDING CODE INSPECTIONS.

Among CSEA’s membership are the state’s building inspectors. Within DAS, it is a small staff that has big responsibility. Across the construction industry, the reputation of this group of building code experts is impeccable. In short, they are professional, they are experienced, and they are extremely good at what they do. Every day, each member executes a high volume of inspection and code review work. Routinely, they catch problems that, if not discovered would undermine the quality and safety of buildings being constructed across our state. The managerial leadership of DAS, who lead the charge for this bill, would be the first to tell you that this staff is made up of the best, most skilled code experts in our state.

But I think that the Office of the State Building Inspector staff would tell you that, while they are excellent at what they do, they aren’t getting any younger. In fact, a significant portion of the staff is eligible or close to being eligible to retire. It appears that this bill is aimed at addressing that issue by allowing the State to replace departing state inspectors with an ad hoc approach to state building inspection. The idea is to allow the state to assign inspection work to private individuals of varying degrees of experience and skill. This path would undoubtedly lead to the practice of “inspector shopping”, which would greatly undermine the quality of the work. I submit to you that that is a wrongheaded way of dealing with this critical state safety function. The current resource of institutional knowledge and skill will be disappearing shortly. Instead of embracing a privatization scheme, the state should look to hire new, younger inspectors so that they can learn from the vast expertise that exists now.

In the DAS submission to OPM proposing this privatization scheme, they reference third-party inspections in Washington, D.C. and New York City. In Washington, D.C., delays in permitting and inspections have gotten worse with the use of third-party firms because they are not familiar with the City’s specific codes and regulations. DAS’s proposal states, “From discussions with individuals familiar with each jurisdiction the programs have been successful and the outcomes have been, overall, positive.” This assertion is contrary to the record. Specifically, an audit by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli’s office notes, “private elevator inspectors in New York City are missing hazardous violations and allowing unsafe conditions to go unrepaired.” This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the failures of for profit, third-party private firms attempting to conduct building and elevator inspections.

In short, the choice now is to either maintain the current strong, effective safety net or to replace it with a net that is riddled with holes. The first path protects the public while the second puts the public at risk. Building inspection is a function our state does extremely well, with cost-effective in-house state employees who work in the public’s interest and not for profits. Let’s not change that.

Please reject Senate Bill 269.

Thank you.

David Glidden
Executive Director, CSEA SEIU Local 2001