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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

Testimony of Rochelle Palache, District Director, SEIU 32BJ

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

HB 6187 An Act Concerning the Restructuring of Certain Taxes and Equity

SB 821 An Act Concerning the Reformation of Certain Taxes and Tax Equity

March 12, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Senator Martin, Representative Cheeseman, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

My name is Rochelle Palache and I am the Connecticut State Director of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the state of Connecticut and 175,000 members up and down the East Coast. Our members form the backbone of the property services industry- building workers, security officers; and office, school, theater, stadium and window cleaners.

I am testifying in strong support of HB 6187 and SB 821. This year has been a painful struggle for so many Connecticut families and particularly SEIU 32BJ members. The COVID pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated Connecticut’s deep economic disparities and pushed many to the brink of desperation. The scale of this crisis demands a bold response—people are suffering and our state has a responsibility to meet our needs.

More than 15,000 families are in danger of eviction and have requested renter’s assistance. One in five Connecticut adults with children said their children don’t have enough food to eat. More than 200,000 without health insurance – and that was before the pandemic.

Just like at the federal level, now is the time to go big – that’s the only path to a robust economic recovery. State-level austerity and cuts to the public sector after the Great Recession were one reason why economic recovery lagged over the past decade.

Connecticut has been a leader in economic and racial inequality. We must “build back better “than before. Connecticut is one of the richest states in the nation, but leads in income and wealth inequality. We see severe racial inequality in income, wealth, housing, education, health care and health outcomes, access to public services, and in the uneven toll of the pandemic. Our extreme inequality is a major obstacle to sustainable, inclusive economic growth. We can level the playing field by making the bold investments we need in essential public services, education, health care, housing, and municipal aid.

We need to keep our economy moving by sending direct assistance to individuals who have lost their jobs during the pandemic with one-time direct stimulus payments of \$500. This would cost \$75 million.

We need to provide relief to property owners for taxes levied on residences and motor vehicles by doubling the maximum property tax credit to \$400. This would cost an estimated \$63 million annually.

We need lower taxes on working class families by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to 50% of the federal EITC and include taxpayers who file with an ITIN. This would cost an estimated \$155 million annually.

These are narrowly focused proposals to restore fairness to the tax code, fund essential services, and jumpstart economic recovery. Connecticut's billionaires have added an additional \$3.6 billion to their wealth during the pandemic. Yet if you make less than \$53,000 a year, you pay an effective tax rate more than triple that of someone making over \$680,000 a year.

That's why we are strongly supporting these bills. We ask that you stand with our state's working families by passing HB 6187 and SB 821