

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6344

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF THE UNEMPLOYED WORKERS'

Title: ADVOCATE.

Vote Date: 3/25/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/18/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The pandemic has increased the number of claims submitted to the Department of Labor. Staff has been reduced and their computer systems are outdated.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None submitted

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[DINA BUTLER, McDONALD'S EMPLOYEE](#)

Five years ago, Dina's wife, who also worked at McDonald's, fainted on the job, hit her head and never recovered. McDonald's gave her nothing except the stone for her grave. After joining Union 32 BJ in order to have a place to work toward getting better pay benefits and treatment, the Department of Labor investigated and came to an agreement with McDonald's owner, George Michell to get back pay because they were being paid less than the Standard Wage. When COVID hit last March, managers laid off the entire night shift. When they began rehiring in May, 4 people were not called back. New employees were hired instead. The case has a lot of complicated evidence, but the injustice is clear and simple. Their jobs were taken away because they demanded fair treatment. The pandemic was an excuse for them to avoid the law. Companies like McDonald's should not be allowed to add to the suffering. This bill simply makes sure companies treat their laid-off employees fairly.

ZAK LEAVY, LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL COORDINATOR, AFSCME Council

This office would assist and educate individuals throughout the process as well as understanding their rights and responsibilities. It would make recommendations based on changes to federal and state law which will help keep people up to date on any modifications. Our unemployment system is complicated and individuals often are unaware of their rights. This exacerbates an already difficult and challenging time in an individual's life. It would help workers from being misclassified and ensure they receive the full benefits they deserve. It will help give the public a voice when they need it most.

SAL LUCIANO, PRESIDENT, CT AFL-CIO

Workers who have never been unemployed before the COVID-19 pandemic may be experiencing unemployment for the first time. It is always a frightening and stressful time for any worker to be unemployed but is especially confusing and difficult during the pandemic. Federal aid packages have created supplemental benefits and new programs to try to meet the needs of unemployed workers. Overloaded staff at the Department of Labor struggle to process claims and meet demands with a significantly reduced staff. It can be daunting and overwhelming for workers to make sure they are receiving their entitled benefits. It seems an appropriate time to create this position. The economic devastation created by the virus will likely linger for years and unemployment could remain high for the foreseeable future. This position would provide workers, especially non-union workers, with the support they need.

JASON ROJAS, HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER, STATE OF CONNECTICUT

The pandemic has led to an unprecedented number of workers turning to the unemployment system and the Department of Labor for support. There is a staggering number of claims that have been filed and each claim needs to be reviewed and each employee contacted. More than \$6.4 billion in unemployment benefits have been paid out over the past year. This proposal is really intended to start a conversation on what we can do better to support the claimants and the Dept. of Labor. Their computers are outdated and their staff has been reduced and budgets held flat.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

Reported by: Marie Knudsen, Assistant Clerk

Date: April 4, 2021