

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Thursday, February 18

Proposed S.B. No. 141: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF PAID MUNICIPAL OR VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS - Support

Proposed S.B. No. 658: AN ACT REQUIRING EMPLOYERS TO RECALL LAID-OFF WORKERS IN ORDER OF SENIORITY - Support

Proposed S.B. No. 660: AN ACT EXPANDING WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS SUFFERED BY ALL WORKERS - Support

Proposed S.B. No. 665: AN ACT ALLOWING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS TO OBTAIN WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS - Support

Proposed S.B. No. 666: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR CORRECTIONAL STAFF, EMERGENCY MEDICAL STAFF AND DISPATCHERS - Support

Proposed S.B. No. 668: AN ACT CONCERNING A FAIR WORK WEEK SCHEDULE - Support

Proposed H.B. No. 5377: AN ACT CONCERNING THE REMOVAL OF COVID-19 RELATED LAYOFFS FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION EXPERIENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2021 - Support

Proposed H.B. No. 5954 AN ACT CONTINUING THE SUSPENSION OF THE EXPERIENCE RATE COMPONENT OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TAX - Support

Senate Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Sampson, Representative Arora, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Stephen Anderson, and I am the President of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a labor union which represents over 11,000 workers employed in the public and private sector, as well as over 11,500 retirees. I submit this testimony on behalf of our members.

SB 141: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF PAID MUNICIPAL OR VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS - Support. We all know the dangers inherent to the job of a firefighter. They are, after all, the ones who run into the burning buildings. And, while the threat of direct injury from the flames is something we all know and can understand, the reality is that firefighters face a variety of deadly hazards in the normal course of their work. Toxic substances and poisonous gases might be invisible to the eye, but the damage that they can do to the bodies of firefighters must always be remembered. Passing SB 141 and providing workers' compensation coverage to "professional and volunteer firefighters who are diagnosed with cancer, acquired through their occupational exposure to toxic substances and poisonous gases" is not only good public policy, but simply the right thing to do for these brave people.

SB 658: AN ACT REQUIRING EMPLOYERS TO RECALL LAID-OFF WORKERS IN ORDER OF SENIORITY - Support. The past year has been unlike any other we have faced. And, for working people, whether or not they are a member of a labor union, this past year has wreaked havoc on the lives of people who work for a living. As COVID infection rates continue to decline and vaccines continue to be distributed, we can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel. SB 658 will provide structure and guidance to employers while providing relief and hope to workers. Getting any laid-off workers back on the job as quickly and in as fair a manner as possible is the best thing for workers and the best thing for Connecticut's economy.

SB 660: AN ACT EXPANDING WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS SUFFERED BY ALL WORKERS - Support;

SB 665: AN ACT ALLOWING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS TO OBTAIN WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS - Support; and

SB 666: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR CORRECTIONAL STAFF, EMERGENCY MEDICAL STAFF AND DISPATCHERS – Support.

CSEA members support all of these critical bills that will improve and expand access to needed treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries (PTSI). PTSI treatment should never have been excluded from workers' compensation protection; these bills give Connecticut the opportunity to ensure that going forward it will not. Whether we're talking about the corrections supervisors represented by CSEA or any worker in our state, no one should have to worry that they do not have access to or cannot afford coverage for treatment for "mental or emotional impairments" that came about as a result of a work experience. CSEA urges passage of SB 660, SB 665, and SB 666.

SB 668: AN ACT CONCERNING A FAIR WORK WEEK SCHEDULE – Support. Prior to the pandemic, the trend towards part-time employment was made even worse for workers when large employers started using on-call scheduling. This practice has grown in retail, food service and hospitality, all sectors dominated by big national players. This practice, while enabling businesses to achieve new efficiencies in managing their labor costs, takes a toll on employees and their families. So-called "on-call" scheduling robs workers of any sense of certainty when it comes to their economic outlook. SB 668 provides workers and employers with clear guidelines that will bring stability to the lives of hundreds of thousands of our neighbors.

HB 5377: AN ACT CONCERNING THE REMOVAL OF COVID-19 RELATED LAYOFFS FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION EXPERIENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2021 - Support; and

HB 5954: AN ACT CONTINUING THE SUSPENSION OF THE EXPERIENCE RATE COMPONENT OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TAX – Support. Unemployment insurance is a critical component of our social safety net and a manifestation of the idea that we have an obligation as humans to help people when they need it. The virus has taken too many lives from us, but we cannot let it also punish people for things beyond our control. HB 5377 and HB 5954 are commonsense responses to the continued challenges we face, and I urge committee members to support these bills.

I thank you for hearing my testimony. I encourage the members of the committee to support SB 141, SB 658, SB 660, SB 665, SB 666, SB 668, HB 5377, and HB 5954.

Stephen Anderson
President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001