



Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thursday, February 18

Testimony of Stacey Zimmerman Associate Director – SEIU CT State Council

Support:

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

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

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

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

**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

**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

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

Chairs Kushner, Porter members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Stacey Zimmerman and I am here representing the Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council. SEIU CT represents 65,000 members both in the public and private sectors; SEIU has over 2 million members in the United States and Canada.

**SB 141: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF PAID MUNICIPAL OR VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS – Support.** We all know how the danger inherent to the job of a firefighter. They are, after all, the ones who run into the burning buildings. The threat of direct injury we all 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, SB 665: AN ACT ALLOWING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS TO OBTAIN WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS, 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.** SEIU members support 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 captains, lieutenants, and counselor supervisors represented by SEIU 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. SEIU 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 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.

Thank you. 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.