Public Hearing Testimony of
Kurt Westby, Commissioner
Department of Labor
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 4, 2021

Good Morning Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Sampson, Representative Arora and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with testimony regarding **House Bill 904, AN ACT CONCERNING THE LABOR DEPARTMENT'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.** My name is Kurt Westby, and I am the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Labor (CT DOL).

The CT DOL supports the proposed bill, which would make an essential position in the agency a classified position instead of unclassified. Within DOL there is an Employment Security Division, which is responsible for the Unemployment Compensation Act and Employment Services. Per CT General Statute 31-237, DOL is required to have an Executive Director to oversee the Employment Security Division. Currently, the law provides that the Executive Director is appointed by the Labor Commissioner subject to the Governor's approval.

While the Executive Director position has been vacant for quite some time, it is critical that this position is made permanent in preparation for significant challenges facing the agency. Passage of the CARES Act I -and CARES Act II has highlighted the strong need for the constant presence of an Executive Director in state classified service with comprehensive knowledge of both federal and state Unemployment Insurance (UI) systems. Further, this Executive Director position is crucial because many DOL retirements are expected in mid-2022 and much institutional knowledge will be lost. Finally, DOL's Unemployment Insurance Modernization (UIM) project must be completed in order to move the Agency's UI technology forward. Therefore, it is necessary to make this position classified to ensure continuity as the agency deals with unprecedented current and future challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am available to answer any questions you may have.