



Testimony of John Brady  
AFTCT Vice President

Labor and Public Employees Committee  
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HB 6478 AAC Workers' Compensation  
SB 1002 AAC Labor Issues Related to COVID-19, Personal Protective Equipment, and other Staffing Matters.  
HB 6595 AAC Labor Matters Related to COVID-19, Personal Protective Equipment, and other Staffing Matters.

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and distinguish members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is John Brady. I am a Registered Nurse and Executive Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a union of 30,000 Educators, Healthcare Professionals, and Public Service Workers. I write to you today in strong support of three bills: HB 6478 AAC Workers' Compensation, SB 1002 AAC Labor Issues Related to COVID-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters, and HB 6595 AAC Labor Matters Related to COVID-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters

*I write on behalf of Jonathan Coelho, a 32 year old probation officer, husband of Katie, and father of Braedyn, age 2, who suffers from cerebral palsy, and Penelope, age 10 months.*

*I write on behalf of Elva Graveline, a 52 year old Certified Nurse's Aide, wife of Michael, mother of Shelly and Felicia, and grandmother to Aria, Lana, and Isla.*

*I write for them because they died from Covid contracted on the job.*

*I also write on behalf of all the AFT Connecticut members who have contracted Covid on the job and survived, now fighting for bills to be paid and hoping that any long-term effects will be limited.*

The Corona Virus Pandemic has highlighted and exasperated many problems for our dedicated essential workers who labored through this pandemic and continue to labor to keep us all safe and care for us in our darkest hours. Many of these problems existed before the pandemic and the pandemic has brought them to the eyes of the public. Other problems are a direct result of the pandemic and the trials of working through the pandemic.

We owe these workers our deepest gratitude and support. These bills are a major step in that direction, and I thank and commend the committee for taking up this important legislation.

### **Support COVID-19 Workers' Compensation Presumption**

Our current Workers' Compensation statue places the burden of proof on the injured party. Almost every single case of Workers' Compensation for Covid-19 that I am aware of has been denied, at least initially, by the hospital or other employer, requiring an appeal with an attorney's assistance.

This delay tactic by employers not only causes unneeded delay in treatment and unneeded psychological harm to the victim, it discourages others from filing cases in the first place.

Perhaps worse than this, I fear that in non-union hospitals, where employees do not have access to union representation or advice, hundreds of claims may go unreported, or dropped upon the initial denial. There is no incentive under the current statute for the employer to expedite the process.

Governor Lamont recognized this problem when he signed Executive Order 7JJJ, which created a rebuttable presumption of Covid 19. However, that Executive Order has expired, even though the Public Health Emergency continues. H.R. 6478 would not deny the employer the right to dispute the case. It would simply shift the burden of proof from the victim to the employer.

I urge you to stand up for the essential worker who have become victims, who reported to work while others were able to shelter in place and support the COVID-19 Workers' Compensation Presumption.

### **Support PTSI for Healthcare Workers**

The Corona Virus Pandemic has highlighted the effect of emotional injuries. Many of our members are considered "essential" and have continued to work, despite increase risks and increased stress. Nowhere has this been as evident as with our dedicated healthcare workers.

Our nurses and other healthcare professionals have lived with the physical and emotional trauma that comes from 12 hour days that often stretch into 16 hours, often without break just to get off the floor and catch their breath, from the fear of contracting Covid-19, and worse, of maybe bringing it home to their families, and of the daily toll that comes from patient death after patient death, sometimes with the healthcare worker being the only one allowed at the bedside in the patient's last hours.

We have all read of stories where doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals who have dealt with this stress day after day with seeming ease, only to one day quietly take their lives.

We need to care for those who care for us. They may seem super human but they are not.

In fact, they feel more deeply than most of society and that makes it possible for them to do what they do.

I urge you to support these heroes so they can receive the care they need and deserve.

### **Support PPE Stockpile/Data Transparency**

This pandemic caught the Healthcare Industry flatfooted. We were not prepared to ramp up care for the increased numbers and severity of a virus that is extremely contagious and of which we knew little of how it spread and how to treat it. It is only because of the dedicated work of Healthcare professionals that even more people did not die. We all saw the pictures of Healthcare Heroes wearing garbage bags and home make masks for protection when supplies ran out. We cannot afford to repeat this lack of preparedness. This legislation will establish stockpiles by both the state and Hospitals so that in future pandemic we will be better prepared and can thus minimize the death and pain, both physical and economic, that we have suffered.

The CDC guidance for PPE use during this pandemic shifted as our scientific knowledge of this virus changed. That is appropriate. However, the CDC was faced with a different challenge, the short supply of PPE. The solution was to develop levels of PPE use based on the science, and the supply. They developed Conventional Capacity, Contingency Capacity, and Crisis Capacity Strategies for use of PPE, based not on science, but on the supplies and use rate (burn rate) reported by hospitals. However, the public and even the Connecticut Department of Public Health, was frustrated with an inability to get this data in a timely manner from the hospitals, leaving DPH, Labor Unions and the public unable to know if the correct strategies were being used.

Let me be clear, it is not that the hospitals did not have this data, it was simply that they were unwilling to share the data. Only John Dempsey Hospital made a good faith effort to do so.

This must be corrected for the safety of Healthcare Professionals and for Public Health and this bill addresses this.

### **Support Staffing Transparency in Hospitals**

Similarly, this bill addresses transparency in staffing in hospitals. The legislature has made several attempts to address this problem and I commend you for these efforts. You have also addressed this issue in long term facilities who now must post the minimum staffing requirements and the daily actual staffing. This bill would extend such posting to hospitals, requiring them to post the staffing matrix which they now report to the state as well as the daily actual staffing, information they already gather. This posting will provide the transparency and protection the public deserves.

### **Support Pandemic Sick Time and Hazard Pay**

Finally, I would like to address pandemic pay and use of pandemic sick time. Essential workers should be compensated for keeping the economy running, providing essential services, and keeping us safe during the pandemic. They should also be able to use pandemic sick pay when they become ill from Covid or need to quarantine. While some employers have provided these benefits, some have not. This bill addresses this disparity.

Again, I want to thank the Committee for raising this important legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.