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**Denise Falzone**  
**Lead Teacher, TEAM Early Education Program**

**An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to Covid-19, Personal Protective  
Equipment and Other Staffing Matters, HB6595 and SB 1002**

**Committee on Labor and Public Employees**  
**March 11, 2021**

Hello. Thank you to the committee for hearing my testimony today in support of the Covid Relief and Essential Worker Pay bills. My name is Denise Falzone. I have worked for over 12 years at the TEAM Early Education Program, where I am also the union steward with 32BJ SEIU for the program's Lower Naugatuck Valley division.

When the pandemic hit and we shut our doors last March, TEAM reached out to the teaching staff to ask if we could provide childcare for essential workers from Griffin Hospital. I volunteered since I did not have young children to care for, and I wanted to support the hospital and our community. In this assignment, I did childcare for preschool and school age children four days a week, five hours per day. I was paid time and a half for these hours, and paid my regular hourly rate for additional hours during which we were shut down. On April 20, I was diagnosed with Covid-19, as were my husband and adult son. We were able to manage our symptoms at home, but we were all out of work for one month. While I was out sick, TEAM did pay me, without using my PTO, due to the shutdown. I believe this was a fair and responsible thing to do for my family and me.

When TEAM re-opened the program for young children ages 0-5 years and all of the teachers returned, there were precautions taken, including mask wearing, temperature checks, health screenings, class size reductions, and more. As expected, however, we did have staff and children get Covid-19. Teachers were forced to quarantine if a child in their care was Covid positive. If it happened once, we were able to use a special two-week time off established for Covid. Unfortunately, there have been cases of staff being quarantined several times and draining their own PTO. In certain cases, teachers have also been required to quarantine past the 10 or 14 days the CDC recommended.

Quarantine precautions make sense, but teachers going without pay does not. All of the teachers are essential. We care for children so others can work. We help our economy in a time of crises. Nevertheless, the hazard pay and Covid compensation I received for my work at the hospital turned out to be a rare exception. It is unfair that teachers should have to sacrifice their own PTO when their employer is requiring them to be out of work, and when the very nature of our work puts us at increased risk of catching COVID. It is demoralizing that our sacrifice isn't supported with regular hazard pay. That is why I hope the committee will vote to support both these bills.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the concerns of my fellow union members and myself.

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Juan Hernandez, Area Leader

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