

TESTIMONY OF RICK MELITA
SEIU STATE COUNCIL
ON S.B. No. 1002 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL
PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING MATTERS.
AND
H.B. No. 6595 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR MATTERS RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL
PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING ISSUES
BEFORE THE LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

MARCH 11, 2021

Greetings, members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Rick Melita and I am the Director of the Connecticut State Council of the Service Employees International Union. SEIU represents over 60,000 active and retired employees in the public and private sector in Connecticut.

I am here today to speak in favor of S.B. No. 1002 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING MATTERS and H.B. No. 6595 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR MATTERS RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING ISSUES.

These bills are a response to the impact on workers from the SARS-COVID 19 pandemic. While we all were hit by a plague made worse by what I would call a buffoonish response -if it hadn't caused so much death and illness- by the previous President those effects were not borne equally by all. Some of us were fortunate enough to work from home, avoid close contact with those infected, and stay safe. Too many did not have such a luxury. And because we live in a society deeply invested in maintaining income and racial inequality- it should come as no surprise that this plague hit low wage workers and workers of color the hardest.

We at SEIU have lost dozens of workers in high risk job titles to COVID. You will hear from others today of stories how they were expected to show up to their newly dangerous low wage jobs, not given appropriate protection, were denied sick time when they got sick, and were slow walked or refused workers compensation for their occupational illnesses. The system we have not only didn't protect them- it wouldn't even cover the costs to bury them. They were lauded as "heroes" but were treated as disposable. When you have to wear a hefty bag to protect yourself- it's clear that you're thought of as garbage.

Specific portions of this bill address among other things the need to stockpile PPE, provide paid sick leave, provide a rebuttable presumption for COVID, ensure recall rights for those laid off, and increase benefits when a job kills. All of which we support.

One of the lies that COVID plague exposed is the one about the benefits of limited government. We have been hollowing out and contracting out government for decades, and when disaster struck- we were totally unprepared-whether it was enough masks and gowns, or CNAs, or clerks to process unemployment claims. I disparaged the former President earlier- but I will say that the current Congress and Administration have met the moment and realized this country needs them to go big with a COVID

relief package. And it is wildly popular, proving the old adage “good policy is good politics”. I urge the General Assembly to go big as well. This bill doesn’t reverse all the mistakes of the last year or the last 40 or the last 400, but it offers a measured approach to taking care of those that misguided policy harmed, and takes steps to protect workers in the future. I urge support of this bill. Thank you.