



**Testimony of
Melissa chin-Hing**

**SB 1002 An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to COVID-19, Personal
Protective Equipment, and other Staffing Matters.**

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

Good Afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Melissa chin-Hing and I have been an adult probation officer at the State of CT court support services office of adult probation for over 13 years. I am here to testify in favor of SB 1002 An Act Concerning Labor Issues Related to COVID-19, Personal Protective Equipment and other Staffing Matters. I'll first state that I'm in full support of this Bill. And my testimony is with regards to section 12 of the bill.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 in February 2020 changed the way we live our everyday lives on a global scale.

Before the plexi-glass partitions went up, before we had cleaning professionals regularly decontaminating our workspaces, before the vaccinations rolled out, we were there on the front lines... Although we did not have an abundance of PPE at the time, we still went to work and did our jobs as best we could with whatever tools we had, along with common sense, to try to keep ourselves safe and navigate the imminent threat of COVID-19.

Since the pandemic started, a typical day in the office would often include traveling to court, where I would physically serve violation of probation arrest warrants- fingerprinting clients in lockup, which was filled with other prisoners and court staff, transporting offenders in the back of a sedan or SUV with merely a cage and partial partition separating the offender from ourselves, personally interacting with states attorneys, judicial marshals, and other court personnel, as well as the offenders who were there to be heard on the docket.

In March 2020 alone, I traveled to several states on extraditions and retakings. I was in both Chicago and the Las Vegas within a week of both states shutting down: and due to airline constraints, probation officers would often find ourselves in the busiest, most-congested airport in the world: Atlanta. This was (and continues to be) our primary airport hub, and I actually traveled to or through it several times over the past year conducting extraditions. Remember, at the onset of covid, this was all before the mask "mandates", "the empty middle row" for flights, and the state-of-the-art air filtration systems that many airlines have since implemented, the N95's... etc. In fact, my partner, the offender, and I still had to pile

in the back row like sardines near the bathroom (which is where they usually sit us): side-by-side 3 in a row. During a global pandemic... I recall a couple of days after coming back from my Las Vegas extradition, I was coughing, wheezing, feverish... I called my doctor, fearful of the imminent. I was told that my fever wasn't high enough to go to one of the two drive through testing centers that our state had set up at the time... so whatever it was, passed, and luckily I'm still here to be able to talk about it. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for everyone else who's been impacted by this disease. I easily could've become a statistic. I had a coworker, a peer, PO who was a husband and father of two, who unfortunately passed away in his early 30's of this disease. This is just my story.... and we all have our respective stories... but I subsequently learned that the facility that we extradited the offender from in Cooke County, Illinois in March had the highest covid-19 rate in the state of Illinois, and that there was a large uptick in the same prison population that housed the offender we were transporting! people tell me I'm absolutely CRAZY when I tell them these stories!!! And in hindsight, I can honestly say... it really doesn't get more hazardous than what we do! No monetary amount on earth is worth the trade off of our physical health, our mental well-being, or our "peace of mind" per se... but the fact is that many other public safety positions, probation has been here throughout the pandemic, performing our jobs and putting ourselves at high-risk of transmission of this deadly disease.

So fast forward to where we are now. Yes, we have more PPE, yes, we have plexiglass partitions... but we still have mandatory, face-to-face contact through office visits, warrant service, transports, searches, mandatory home visits, the list goes on... it's very similar to parole, in fact. And yes, our administration implemented tools and policies to minimize the spread of this deadly disease, but as you can see, we have been putting ourselves in harm's way from DAY ONE. I have received notice after notice after notice of both staff and offenders who have tested positive that were either in my office building or whom I was in close proximity to at in the courthouse that I work out of... it's real. The hazard. The risk. The daily sacrifice we continue to make to perform our jobs effectively and serve our community.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity. In closing, I urge you to support this legislation.