

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5356

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PANDEMIC PAY FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS.

Vote Date: 3/24/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/8/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Essential workers deserve a bonus for performing their jobs during the pandemic crisis.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None submitted.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Capitol Community College, Grants and Development Officer, John McNamara: Supports the bill stating it is about fairness and equity. It provides unemployment benefits for eligible adjunct faculty who are under contract on a semester-by-semester basis just as contracted employees in other occupations do when their contracts end. Hardships can be created for part time faculty who may teach at more than one institution. Many adjuncts with expertise do not work a full-time week. Community college budgets do not cover for enough full-time faculty and adjuncts play an outsized role in ensuring academic quality.

Southern Connecticut State University, Dispatcher, Sean Alexis: Supports the bill stating dispatchers could not do their jobs from home. The pandemic added more stress onto an already stressful job. They had to sequester themselves from police officers on campus and from their co-workers and clean their workstations before every shift. When the campus was shut down, public and staff were still contacting them for information, and they became the frontline of communication. As safe guarders of the campus regarding public and staff, they routinely had to tell other staff members they weren't allowed on campus which caused anger and confusion directed at them even though they were just following guidelines.

AFSCME Council 4, Executive Director, Jody Barr: Supports the bill stating it became "all hands-on deck" when workers were suddenly deemed essential and thrown into a chaotic situation adjusting to a new normal. There was often inadequate PPE, even when the State procured enough safety supplies. Workers had to provide services at great risk to themselves and their families. Now is the time to provide compensation for work they did when others were fortunate enough to work from home.

CT Coalition for Retirement Security, Coordinator, Retired Juvenile Probation Officer, Michael Barry: Supports the bill stating even though the court system reduced their hours significantly for the public, they never closed when they were working as Juvenile Probation Officers for the Judicial Branch. Essential workers stuck together and made things work and every one of them should be recognized. Pandemic pay will make a big difference for these workers who kept our society going during an international health crisis.

CT EMS Chiefs Association, President, Bruce Baxter: Supports the bill stating the pandemic brought local 9-1-1 Emergency Medical Services Organizations into the forefront of the public view. They responded to the needs of their community whenever calls came in. They are pleased they will be able to benefit from this pool of recognition dollars.

Oncology Medical-Legal Partnership, Yale Law School, Solomon Center, Zach Shelly, Alex Miskho, Emily Rock, James Bhandary-Alexander: Supports the bill stating that, as attorneys and students, they provide legal representation to low-income cancer patients. Their testimony told of a Cancer patient who continued to do vital work even during a disability leave for chemotherapy treatments. For many cancer patients they worked with, there wasn't any real choice. If they took time off, they would not be able to afford lifesaving treatments or would be unable to keep supporting their families. Funding should be allocated to compensate essential workers who sacrificed so much to keep the world running.

AFSCME Council 4, Local 1303-479, President, Maryellen Burnes: Supports the bill stating when Covid 19 began, all our lives were turned upside down and workplaces became possible areas of infection. As Social Service and Park and Recreation Director for the town of Essex, even though town hall was closed, she still met the public through appointments. Service delays meant even more transition to email and phone calls to protect themselves and the public. They still conducted home visits and had to work around one another which caused added stress. Payment should be provided to all frontline workers.

Archdiocese of Hartford, Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry, Domestic Worker Justice Campaign, Executive Director, Lynn Campbell: Supports the bill stating domestic workers continued their work during the pandemic at great risk because they had no options. If they took time off to quarantine or care for a sick family member, there would be no job for them when they returned. The immigration status of many essential workers impedes their ability to receive any compensation. They urge setting aside political differences and supporting inclusion of full and part time essential workers in the distribution of any pandemic pay regardless of immigration status.

AFSCME. Council 4, Local 466, Vice President, Brooke Carta: Supports the bill stating every area of the workforce stepped up in many ways never thought necessary or possible, providing seamless delivery of services during the pandemic. A one-time payment of \$2,000

to full-time employees and \$1,000 to part-time employees deemed essential would send a strong message of appreciation to thousands of employees.

AFSCME, Council 4, Department of Administrative Services, Data Support Specialist, Collen Carter: Supports the bill stating during the pandemic, thousands of State employees were suddenly teleworking. Their department was 24/7 because they needed to be at their jobs so communities the State was serving weren't impacted. It is important to recognize the workers who had to be present at their jobs during the pandemic every day. This bill would show support in more ways than one.

AFSCME, Council 4, Local 478, Norwalk DMV, Rob Cheatham: Supports the bill stating when Covid-19 struck, the workers at the DMV were deemed essential and they had to continue providing services to the public and adjust to a frightening new normal. This caused great stress. Despite the pandemic, the public still required DMV services that could not be done remotely. Many workers sacrificed their safety and health to ensure the public did not lose access to services. ALL essential workers have earned either a \$2,000 or \$1,000 payment for what they have done.

Self, West Hartford Resident, Tom Connolly: Supports the bill stating CT has a huge budget surplus, a rainy-day fund and has received millions of dollars from the Federal Government for pandemic relief. Essential workers risked their lives and the lives of their families for the good of the residents of the State. Now is the time to say "Thank you" in a way that minimally recognizes their sacrifice.

State Medical Society: Supports the bill stating the work of essential workers in CT should be recognized and appreciated for the courageous work they have provided. This bill recognizes and thanks them for their efforts.

Connecticut Domestic Worker Justice Campaign, Active Member, Norma de Leon: Supports the bill stating the pandemic has made the importance of paid leave even clearer. The people who work in the fields, supermarkets, clean hospitals and care for children and grandparents will remember you as heroes or tyrants depending on the outcome of this bill.

AFSCME, Council 4, Hartford Juvenile Detention Center, Officer, Bryan DiDonato: Supports the bill stating as a detention officer, there was never a time when the center was shut down, closed, or put on hold. At multiple times during the pandemic, 60 to 70% of the work staff were sick or tested positive. The juveniles still required care, and this meant that employees were subjecting their family/friends to risk. This bill would give essential workers compensation and honor the work they did.

Waterbury Team Inc, Home Visitor, Karen Droz: Supports the bill stating that in the capacity of home visitors, they were asked to shift how they provided support to the families they served. They provided school lunches, diapers, and often grocery shopped for families in quarantine. They are thankful that Early Childhood employees are finally receiving recognition.

CT Communist Party USA, Chair, Joelle Fishman: Supports the bill stating the pandemic has not only revealed unfair and inhumane treatment of low wage essential workers, but at the same time, served to increase inequalities of race and wealth. Pandemic pay for essential

workers is a small step to provide dignity and economic well-being and make whole the largely Black and Latino workforce who have risked their lives to do their jobs. It is the responsibility of government to make sure families can survive.

AFSCME Council 4, Local 749, Steward, Corrado Ganci: Supports the bill stating that as a Juvenile Detention Officer at the Hartford and Bridgeport Centers, when COVID-19 arrived it hit like a ton of bricks. Many juveniles and staff got infected. They were unprepared for the pandemic and wore make-shift cloth bandana face coverings because N-95 masks were not made available. Nearly half the JDOs came down with COVID, leaving them understaffed and working double shifts to cover the shortfall. Providing pandemic hero pay would recognize the sacrifice and dedication of essential workers.

Connecticut Working Families, State Director, Sarah Ganong: Supports the bill stating it provides essential workers with a bonus for time worked during the pandemic. These workers should be compensated and honored for their commitment, dedication, and countless sacrifices.

University of Connecticut, Janitor, Ciro Gutierrez Alva: Supports the bill stating cleaning workers were always considered essential, even when buildings were closed due to bad weather or other emergencies. They never received any extra compensation, even though in the same circumstances, other workers stayed home. Covid was different because due to the nature of their work, they stayed in contact with other people at the university, on the streets, and on the bus, which exposed them to the virus. This bill is a recognition of their contribution in the fight to beat the pandemic. It is an act of justice for those who were in the front line.

AFSCME Council 4, Local 3195, President, Stacie Harris-Byrdsong: Supports the bill stating school support staff are some of the lowest paid works in the school system. They never hesitated to work on the frontlines. Food service workers were handing out meals to students in need. School nurses were assessing sick students. Each of these workers exposed themselves and their families daily to Covid-19. The frontline workers knew the struggle wasn't about words people used like "Heroes". It was about deeds and showing up, being brave, and taking care of those who needed it. It is now time for legislators to show they see and understand the sacrifices.

CT AFLCIO, President, Ed Hawthorne: Supports the bill stating CT's public health and safety has depended heavily on the efforts of frontline workers and their jobs became highly dangerous during this time. These dedicated workers continued to care for patients, stock grocery shelves, staff prisons, etc. and ensure taxpayers had continued access to essential services while many worked comfortably from home. This bill will stimulate CT's economy, help workers make ends meet, and show respect to people who have kept the State going throughout the pandemic.

Bridgeport Generation Now, President Co-Director, Callie Gale Heilmann: Supports the bill stating she saw firsthand how the global pandemic and public health emergency deeply affected Bridgeport residents. Essential workers can be hidden in plain sight. Economic relief, and the recovery we need, is more than election-year tax cuts. At a time when the State is facing an enormous budget surplus and the Rainy-Day Fund is overflowing, we should allocate funding to compensate the essential workers who have sacrificed so much during this historic crisis.

New Haven Public School District, AFSME Member Local 3144, IT Director, Gildemar

Herrera: Supports the bill stating the first thing that comes to mind when we think of essential workers are police, firefighters, and medical personnel. No one thinks of IT workers who are the unsung heroes of the pandemic. Many jobs could not function without them. It was their job to make sure all devices were working properly, and everyone had connectivity. Pandemic pay would help put back some of the money these workers lost and reward them for the extra efforts and time they put in.

Cheshire Correctional Institution, Correction Officer, AFSCME Local 387, President, Sean

Howard: Supports the bill stating when the pandemic hit, prisons became the petri dish for the spread of the virus and its variants. Their union had to buy 10,000 masks to make sure correctional staff were protected because they were not prepared. More than 1,300 front-line DOC employees contracted COVID and its variants, and coupled with already inadequate staffing levels, the pandemic made prisons even more dangerous. This is a meaningful way to thank essential workers for putting their lives and health at risk.

Connecticut Communist Party, Southern CT State University, Food Service Employee,

Jahmal Henderson: Supports the bill stating food service employees came faithfully to work which exposed their entire families every day to the virus. They kept the State moving despite the personal risk to their health. It is time to treat these essential workers as the heroes they truly are.

CT Education Association, Legal Counsel, Melanie I .Kolek: Supports the bill stating

hundreds of member teachers got sick and continue to suffer personal effects of COVID. They contracted the virus from a known positive contact at their school with no exposure at home or in the community. Teachers rightfully feared for their own safety and of their loved ones. These essential workers need our support now more than ever.

Department of Corrections, Parole Officer 2, James Long: Supports the bill stating parole officers and counselors assigned to the Board of Pardons and Paroles continued hearing and revocations hearings that allowed members to make informed parole release decisions. These dedicated public servants saved CT taxpayers money. They were not allowed to telecommute and reported to work, conducted drug screens in their assigned districts, and set up home investigations and releases for offenders. Correction facilities were at critical emergency staffing levels. These officers provided a valuable service to the residents of CT.

SEIU 32VJ, Vice President, CT State Director, Rochelle Palache: Supports the bill stating it will provide much needed stability to workers who had to deal with erratic and unpredictable schedules. They were unable to plan improvements to their lives because they could not take classes to improve their skills, take a second job or even set up medical appointments for themselves or their family.

Capital Community College, Faculty Member, Former Department Chair, Dr. Jeffrey Partridge:

Supports the bill stating as an adjunct faculty supervisor, he has seen the difficulties his colleagues faced, particularly those who rely on these positions for a significant part of their income.

Unitarian Universalist Society, Minister, Rev. Josh Pawelek: Supports the bill stating if we have learned anything from two years of pandemic living, it is that frontline workers continued their essential jobs while facing dangerous conditions, even exposing themselves to illness, and at times, death. It is time for CT to demonstrate its gratitude, not with yard signs, platitudes and handshakes, but with financial compensation.

Ula-Unidad, Latina en Accion, Recovery for All Coalition Member, Adriana Rodriguez: Supports the bill stating as an essential migrant working woman, she wants to join all who are uniting to improve working conditions for everyone. During the crisis, she worked in person at a laundry, cleaning houses and cleaning at a university. She, her husband and 2 children all contracted COVID. They were not able to collect unemployment or receive government assistance because they were immigrants. They are not a burden; they are essential and want to be treated the same as everyone else.

AFSCME Local 749, Member, Juvenile Detention Officer, Andrew Samsel: Supports the bill stating during the height of the pandemic, their facilities became a flashpoint for the spread of COVID19. Early on, they took steps to urge the judicial branch to provide N95 masks and PPE. After every shift, workers had to be methodical to protect their families. As juvenile detention officers, they understand the struggles of being in a congregate setting and at increased risk. This bill provides a simple token of appreciation for their commitment to serve the public.

AFSCME, Council 4, Vocational Rehab Counselor, Blue Hills, Daisy Sanchez: Supports the bill stating it would be a show of support for the work essential workers did during the pandemic. Typically, a non-essential job, but when the pandemic started the status moved into the essential category. This caused extra fear and stress because she was now at increased risk. Now is the time to compensate essential workers and show them support.

CT Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWELF) Policy and Program Coordinator, Nicole Sanclemente: Supports the bill stating their clients have had to bear the overwhelming burden of the pandemic while receiving unlivable and unsustainable wages as essential workers. Many are the main breadwinners who were forced to choose between caring for themselves and loved ones and earning a paycheck. Thousands of essential workers, especially workers of color and women, risked their lives to keep society afloat and haven't yet received any pandemic pay though they played a vital role throughout the crisis.

CT AFT, Chief of Staff, Stuart Savelkoul: Supports the bill stating the country and the economy kept moving because essential workers showed up to work at a time of great uncertainty and risk to their personal health. There is really no way to repay for this service, but this bill is a step in the right direction.

CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, Senior Public Policy Advisor, Jeff Shaw: Supports the bill stating community nonprofits are the backbone of the health and human services delivery system and are critically important to the State's long-term recovery. This one-time payment program is an important recognition of a heroic workforce. This one-time payment will do little to stop the trend of non-profit staff members from leaving their jobs for higher paying jobs, but it shows the State is committed to investing in this critical workforce.

CT State University, Tunxis Community College, Adjunct Faculty, Jessica Somers: Supports the bill.

CT Nurses Association, Interim Chair, Stephanie McGuire, MSN: Supports the bill stating the healthcare workforce is facing nursing and staff shortages as well as increased workplace violence. Nurses feel undervalued, overwhelmed and unsupported. The pandemic required nurses to push fear and worries aside and apply their knowledge and trust their colleagues in the face of dramatic policy shifts. This bill acknowledges the hard work and courage nurses displayed during the pandemic.

AFSCME Council 4, Local 704, President, Dept of Correction, Parole & Community Service Office, ID Records Specialist, Mark Torres: Supports the bill stating throughout his career, they have been designated non-essential employees, but that changed overnight with COVID. They were required to take on a tremendous risk by reporting to work during a time of heightened fear and uncertainty. It is an understatement to say they sacrificed to provide a vital public service. This bill would help recognize and affirm the importance and value of workers dedicated to serving the public.

Dept of Transportation, CSEA SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward: Supports the bill stating hundreds of thousands of essential workers risked their lives to keep society afloat. To honor their service, commitment, and sacrifice, he encourages passage of this bill which would give these brave workers a pay bonus.

SEIU, Lobbyist, Stacey Zimmerman: Supports the bill stating the past two years have shown some glaring truths as a society that have been overlooked for far too long. Many of the essential worker heroes are low wage earners or come from communities who have historically been discriminated against. This bill addresses some of this by rewarding and recognizing heroic actions.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Self, David Godbout: Opposes all bills and sees the process as a violation of his Fourth Amendment Rights.

Reported by: Marie Knudsen

Date: April 7, 2022