

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-317

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING EMPLOYEES.

Vote Date: 3/22/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/8/2022

File No.: 249

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee
Rep. Michael A. Winkler, 56th Dist.,
Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.,
Rep. Anne M Hughes, 135th Dist.,
Rep. David Michel, 14th Dist.,
Rep. John "Jack" F. Hennessy, 127th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill allows for striking employees to collect unemployment benefits.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Department of Labor, Commissioner, Danate Bartolomeo; opposes this bill stating that if this bill were to pass, CTDOL would be unable to implement the technical system changes legislated within until well after the department's transition to a modernized Unemployment System (UI), ReEmployCT, which is scheduled to launch in July 2022. It is stated that this bill also may affect the solvency of the UI Trust Fund. It is stated that the Department requests that the provision in Section 2 include gender-neutral language.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Stop and Shop, Employee, Jose Anaya; supports this bill stating that he, along with 31,000 other stop and shop employees, went on strike in April of 2019. It is stated that he, and other employees, were concerned about how they were going to pay their bills. It is stated that if workers were able to have unemployment benefits while on strike, that would give them the power they need to advocate for themselves and their coworkers, knowing that if they had no choice but to strike, they would have a safety net to protect themselves and their families.

Local Union 777, Member, Cameron Chaplin; supports this bill stating that this bill would pave the way for more fair and just negotiations. It is stated that employers can unfairly prolong negotiations that affect the striking workers because they know if they stall long enough the employees would have to agree and come back to work. It is stated that without any income during a strike, the employees have to decide whether to fall behind paying their obligations or give in to what is being presented even though it is less than what they feel is fair. It is stated that this bill would help sustain employees and their families until the dispute is settled.

Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne; supports this bill stating that the pandemic exposed and intensified a host of worker grievances, including inadequate wages, demanding schedules, unaffordable healthcare and historically high CEO compensation. It is stated that this led to workers across the nation to exercise their right to fight back and strike. It is stated that it takes tremendous courage to go out on strike, but many workers believe the chance to achieve long term improvements in pay, benefits and working conditions is worth the risk of losing pay, or even their job. It is stated that this bill would lessen the economic impact on Connecticut striking workers by providing them with unemployment benefits after a two-week waiting period. It is stated that this bill would align Connecticut unemployment policy with New Jersey and New York.

Connecticut Education Association, Legal Counsel, Melanie Kolek; supports this bill stating that this is a step toward equitably balancing the employee-employer relationship at times when workers are at a disadvantage in advocating fairer wages and better working conditions.

Stop and Shop, Union Steward, Mary Jane Massimino; supports this bill stating that they went on strike for nearly two weeks in 2019. It is stated that the strike was easier for some than others, and many workers that live check to check would not know how to make ends meet. It is stated that if workers had unemployment benefits to back them up during a strike, they could strike for longer with more leverage and receive better outcomes.

Stop and Shop, Employee, Patrice Thomas; supports this bill stating that if their employers in 2019 knew they could strike for longer, perhaps they could've gotten a better deal. It is stated that if workers were able to collect unemployment in the unfortunate, rare circumstances of a strike, it would give the working people of Connecticut the leverage they need to achieve strong contracts.

SEIU, Organizer, Stacey Zimmerman; supports this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

CBIA, Vice President of Public Policy, Eric Gjede; opposes this bill stating that Connecticut's unemployment system and trust fund are important social safety nets that have proven critical in recent years. It is stated that the system is funded exclusively by employers for the purpose of ensuring workers that become unemployed by no fault of their own receive a portion of their former compensation while seeking new employment. It is stated that a striking employee fails to meet any of the requirements for individuals seeking unemployment benefits in the state of Connecticut. It is stated that the unemployment trust fund should not

be treated as a source of revenue to fund lawmakers' policy goals or to provide leverage in disputes between employers and employees.

Connecticut, Resident, David Godbout; opposes this bill stating that it would violate the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants, CEO, Bonnie Stewart; opposes this bill stating that Connecticut's unemployment system was established to aid and assist residents of Connecticut who lose their jobs through no fault of their own as they actively seek new employment. It is stated that allowing striking workers to collect unemployment benefits does not align with the program's original purpose. They have chosen to leave the workforce, and because they are striking, they are not readily available to work. Monies for such individuals should come from strike funds, or similar programs. It is stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has also drained our state's unemployment trust fund. As the fund is financed solely through taxes on employers, Connecticut employers' unemployment taxes have been increased, and other increases are planned for the foreseeable future to restore the fund's solvency. Expanding the unemployment insurance program is not in the best interests of the state as a whole.

Reported by: Alex Koshgarian, Assistant Clerk Date: 3/29/2022