

# Labor and Public Employees Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-422

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESSENTIAL WORKERS COVID-19 ASSISTANCE

**Title:** PROGRAM.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2022

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/15/2022

**File No.:**

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### **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

The Labor and Public Employees Committee

Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135th Dist.,

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.,

Rep. Joshua M. Hall, 7th Dist.

### **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Many essential workers were required to take sick leave during the pandemic due to testing positive for the virus or exposure to the virus. Many of those workers were forced to use all of their paid sick leave and went without pay in order to keep their communities safe. This bill would help those workers who were unable to work because of the pandemic by allowing them to recover up to 80 hours of paid sick leave.

### **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language defines the employees eligible, expands the reasons they can receive the benefit, clarifies that the benefit is only available for uncompensated time off and clarifies the employers do not have to provide the benefit.

### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities; supports this bill stating the pandemic affected essential workers harder than those who were able to transition to remote work. They believe that it is incredibly important to take care of the essential workers who worked throughout the pandemic.

### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

New Opportunities Inc., Regional Director, Brian Bonds; supports the bill because frontline workers have been essential in fighting the spread of COVID and they deserve the recognition. It was suggested that the bill include homeless response workers in the bill. Essential workers faced many challenges and this bill would help essential workers.

CT Coalition to End Homelessness, Chief Operating Officer, Sarah Fox; supports this bill but suggests homeless response workers added as a category of essential employee. It is stated that frontline workers include homeless response workers since they were helping to protect one of the most vulnerable populations. It is stated that the online application does not allow for homeless response workers to apply.

Partnership for Strong Communities, Executive Director, Kiley Gosselin; supports this bill strongly supports the inclusion of frontline homeless response workers.

Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund, Policy Director, Madeline Granato; supports this bill stating that the majority of frontline workers are women and people of color. It is stated that this bill would help support those who risked their life working through the pandemic and is an opportunity to provide relief to the essential workers that worked throughout the pandemic.

Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne; supports this bill stating that the essential workers who continued to work through all of the spikes and variants despite having exhausted their sick leave. It is stated that essential workers had nothing to protect them and their families from losing the paycheck if they missed work and would help essential workers by giving them retroactive paid sick leave.

Connecticut Education Association, Legal Counsel, Melanie I. Kolek; supports this bill stating that it would extend the window of eligibility for essential workers to qualify for pandemic pay. It is stated that frontline essential workers deserve the support after they have supported us throughout the pandemic.

Homes with Hope, President and CEO, Helen McAlinden; supports bill stating that their frontline workers played an incredibly important role in helping the homeless. It is stated that it would help support their frontline staff after they worked tirelessly and selflessly throughout the entire pandemic.

The Open Hearth Association, President and CEO, Marilyn E. Rossetti; supports this bill with the request that includes homeless response workers as essential workers. It is stated that this is the time to recognize the homeless response workers for everything they have done during the pandemic for the homeless population.

CSEA SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward; supports this bill stating that many of the people who are essential workers contracted the virus or had to quarantine. It is mentioned that workers who had to do this ran out of paid sick leave, and this bill would give back to the workers who gave up their safety during the pandemic.

Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council, Member, Stacey Zimmerman; supports this bill.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

Insurance Association of Connecticut, oppose this bill because the bill requires employers to hold the financial weight of COVID-19 related absences. This would increase costs to the employers when they are already facing employee shortages and increased operating costs.

Connecticut Business & Industry Association, Vice President of Public Policy, Eric Gjede; oppose this bill stating that the first 80 hours of paid leave is paid for by the employer and does not offer a corresponding payroll tax credit to fund this. It is stated that this means that businesses will cover the cost of the labor mandate at a time when they are least likely to be able to afford it.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Senior Legislative Associate, Zachary McKeown; opposes this bill stating it would place an unfunded mandate on the towns and cities and business costs would be increased.

The Alliance, Senior Public Policy Advisor, Jeff Shaw; opposes this bill stating it would place an unfair burden on Connecticut's nonprofits that are already underfunded. It is stated that this legislation should include funding for this mandate for nonprofits.

**Reported by:**

**Date: 4/5/2022**