

Testimony of

Jody Barr, Executive Director

AFSCME Council 4, 444 East Main Street New Britain, CT. 06051

**S.B. 163 - AN ACT PROTECTING EMPLOYEE FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND
CONSCIENCE.**

**Judiciary Committee
March 4, 2022**

Good afternoon, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Jody Barr and I serve as the Executive Director of AFSCME Council 4 which represents 30,000 public and private employees throughout Connecticut. On behalf of our members, it is my pleasure to be here with you today to speak in support of SB 163 An Act Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience.

I have been an active union member for over 25 years. I have been an integral part of helping workers within their workplace. I have served as an active member of SUOAF AFSCME since 1997, within Local 2836, representing non-Teaching faculty within the CSCU system. From 2013 to 2018 I served as the SUOAF AFSCME Local 2836 President representing 800+ non-teaching Faculty within the CSCU system. In 2018 I was elected to serve as the Council 4 Executive Director replacing Sal Luciano

In 25 years of seeing the value of a union, I am outraged that corporate businesses would focus on lining the pockets of stockholders over valuing the worth of workers and treating them fairly.

Forming a union, or the ability to form a union within a workplace is a First Amendment right. Granted to workers in the Constitution and upheld by the Supreme Court who has recognized it is a violation of the First Amendment to force people to listen to views other than their own.

Union members should not have to face intimidation or bullying tactics by their bosses or supervisors for trying to form a union or vote for a union. When intimidation tactics are pervasive, it can impact employee morale and productivity and even harm the services they provide to our constituents.

I speak from personal experience on this. One of my first jobs in Eastern Connecticut as an 18-year-old college student was in a potato chip manufacturing company where I was exposed to a "captive audience meeting".

During a required "orientation training" management required all new hires to attend a captive audience meeting before being assigned their department and job. We were required to sit in a classroom style training room while Human Resources started babbling about how bad the union was and then showed us a captive audience video. The video detailed a cartoon illustration of a worker who left on payday with cash flowing from their pockets, then as they left work and walked into the "Union Building" union dues were taken and because the Union took all of their profits, the worker left the "union building" with no money in his pockets. Meanwhile they showed the Union building growing bigger and bigger. I left this meeting feeling completely shaken and I had no idea if I would lose my job

for being part of a union. My employer basically told me that unionism was evil. I was left to believe that joining or helping form a union would cost me my job and that unions were bad for employees.

New employees are often told they will be attending a new employee orientation. But it's actually a captive audience presentation. Employers use deterrents and intimidating tactics to "train" new employees that Unions are bad. Employers use these tactics to scare members to make a choice between having a job, job protection and the ability to feed their family or being unemployed and not being hired and having able to provide for their families.

In quoting from the Cambridge University Press, "These meetings occur during work hours, when management is best situated to shackle employees and force them to attend through the exertion of economic authority and play on the fears of job loss if employees vote in favor of unionization."

Without a union, our workers work without protections. They lose their right to fair wages, job security, and collective action to safeguard their individual privilege.

SB 163 creates a state labor standard. It hinders employers from penalizing or firing employees who reject to attend any employer-sponsored "meetings". It also will prohibit employers from chastising employees if they decline having to listen to speech communicating the employer's opinion involving religious or political matters.

I implore the Committee to defend workers constitutional entitlements by passing SB 163.

Thank you for this opportunity to be here today to speak in front of all of you.