



March 8, 2022

Legislative Hearing Testimony Submission – Labor and Public Employees Committee

H.B. No. 5353 (RAISED): AN ACT CONCERNING A FAIR WORK WEEK SCHEDULE

The Connecticut Food Association, the trade association representing a full spectrum of the retail food industry and collectively employing over 75,000 Connecticut residents, appreciates the opportunity to address this Committee about an issue that we as responsible employers agree is an important consideration for our entire workforce. The pandemic has certainly posed massive scheduling challenges for our state's food stores, as balancing the safety of our workforce and serving consumers has never been more complicated.

The Job Market Is in Flux

The biggest impact to food stores over the last two years has been the labor disruption throughout the entire food supply chain. "Help wanted" notices and sign-on bonuses are more prevalent than ever, particularly among blue-collar and service industry workers. Be it crop production, manufacturing, importing, transporting or retailing...labor shortages have persisted for months as employers in each of these industry sectors can't find enough workers. Driving all of this is the evolution of the gig economy, lack of access to and high cost of childcare, pandemic relief, unemployment benefits, shifting demographics, personal health concerns, and a surge in demand for goods.

Employees Have Options

As workers continue to re-examine career choices and these factors slowly ease, labor shortages in the food supply chain could stick around for years. We agree that Connecticut's **employees should be given adequate notice of their work schedule** and not forced to work unreasonable hours that interfere with individuals' responsibilities outside of their employment. **Food retailers strive to accommodate employees due to the intense competition for this workforce within our industry.** The retail industry has many transient part-time employees who tend to "job shop" amongst different types of retailers. This leaves employers unaware of who may be in their workforce on a week-to-week basis, leaving a store unable to fill open positions with unscheduled employees without being subject to a penalty.

Grocers Must Win the Talent War

The pandemic has had long-lasting effects on the grocery industry, especially when it comes to labor. Food retailers have hired hundreds of thousands of workers to manage the surge in demand for food and other household products that have taxed their stores, warehouses, and supply chains. But the recent Omicron surge felt like a repeat of March 2020 as grocers experienced serious staffing shortages. While companies are hustling to get through the surge, some are already working to change their labor models to avoid similar challenges in the future.

I urge you to take no action on this bill.

Sincerely,

Wayne Pesce

Connecticut Food Association