



Testimony of
Roger Senserrich, Communications Director
Connecticut Working Families Organization
Labor and Public Employees Committee, March 8, 2022

Re: Testimony in Support of H.B. 5353, An Act Concerning A Fair Work Week Schedule

Good Morning Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Vice-Chairs and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Roger Senserrich, and I'm the Communications Director at the Connecticut Working Families Organization. We strive to be the political home of the multi-racial working class and run strategic legislative and electoral campaigns to advance social justice and create an economy that works for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.B. 5353: An Act Concerning A Fair Work Week Schedule.

A Fair Work Week Schedule

All workers have a right to a good, stable job that pays them a living wage and treats them with respect. Jobs should be a source of pride and opportunity- not of fear and uncertainty.

More than 350,000 workers¹ are employed in Connecticut in retail, food service, and hospitality industries. Many of them earn poverty wages, with unstable schedules that make their lives and their take home pay unpredictable. Their employers keep them "on call", instead of offering them stable, predictable schedules.

Many of these workers start their week not knowing when they will be called to work or how many shifts they will get. They might be asked to come in with little notice, leaving them scrambling to find childcare or transportation, as they hurriedly have to change their plans. They might be told that they do not need to come in or send home early, losing income they counted on to pay their bills that week. For those workers with children, they might not know any given day who will be putting their kids to bed or picking them up from school.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2018/acs-5year.html>

Research has shown that unstable schedules are a widespread, and growing problem, that disproportionately impacts women and people of color. It has also made clear that on-call scheduling, and the instability it creates, has a clear negative impact on both workers, their children, and the broader economy.

A widespread problem

Unstable scheduling has become endemic for workers in the service sector. An [extensive survey conducted by the Shift Project in 2018](#)² showed that two thirds of Connecticut workers in service jobs described their work schedules as irregular or variable. 43 percent had variable shifts, meaning that they changed from one week to the next, while 22 percent had rotating or split shifts. Only 19 percent had a regular daytime schedule.

Erratic schedules extended to the amount of hours worked, as well. The average worker reported a gap of thirteen hours between the week they worked the most and the one they worked the least hours during the past month. This translates to a 37 percent variation of income levels, creating a huge level of uncertainty about total take home pay any given month.

Research also shows that workers receive very little notice of their schedules. Less than half of surveyed Connecticut workers (44 percent) knew their schedules more than two weeks in advance. Close to a third (31 percent) had between one or two week's notice. A quarter had less than a week's notice; the majority in that group (18 percent of all workers) had four days or less. Receiving advance notice, however, was not enough to guarantee stable schedules. Two-thirds of workers reported keeping their schedule open for work, as they were expected to be on-call if shifts became available.

Employers sometimes tout erratic schedules as a way to provide workers with “flexibility”, but research makes clear that workers reject that notion. A very large majority of workers (74 percent) expressed a preference for more predictable schedules. That share was even higher among workers that had the most unpredictable schedules (over 83 percent).

Erratic schedules pose a challenge for workers. Half of workers said that their schedule did not provide enough flexibility for them to handle family needs. More than a quarter saw their schedules as enough of a headache to become a chronic source of extra stress; almost three-quarters say that their work schedule sometimes, often, or always causes extra stress. Forty percent say that their work schedule always or often makes it hard to meet their caregiving responsibilities. These burdens become even more acute for working parents.

² <https://irle.berkeley.edu/working-in-the-service-sector-in-connecticut/>

The pandemic and economic recovery has not eased these impacts. For all the talk about hero pay and essential workers, [a national survey from Harvard researchers](#)³ found that erratic scheduling practices have not changed following during or after the COVID-19 lockdowns. In the most recent data, a striking 64 percent of workers received less than two weeks' notice on their schedule; 21 percent reported on-call shifts, 11 percent canceled shifts and 57 percent shift timing changes in the past month. More than a third (36 percent) had a "clopening" shift, having to close the store and reopen it the following day with little to no rest. Two thirds of those surveyed said they wanted a more stable and predictable work schedule. More than half of those working part time (53 percent) wanted more shifts.

Racial and gender disparities present before the pandemic have grown wider, as well. People of color, especially women, are more likely to work in hourly service jobs, meaning they are more likely to be exposed to erratic schedules. They are also more likely to have to deal with unpredictable schedules, cancellations, and short notice periods within the service sector. Overall, women of color were 15-30 percent more likely to experience canceled shifts, on-call shifts, and involuntary part-time work compared with white men.

The impact of unstable schedules on workers

Erratic scheduling is more than a minor inconvenience for workers. It has a persistent effect on their well being, and a devastating impact on their families.

We expect our jobs to be a source of stability; they are the foundation of our financial well being, the organizing principle that we set our routines and lives around. For workers that have to live with unpredictable scheduling, however, this foundation is built on shaky ground. Instead of a source of security, their jobs become a source of uncertainty.

[Research shows](#)⁴ that close to a third of hourly service sector workers (29 percent) reported hunger hardship, that is, either went hungry or relied on food pantries as they could not afford enough food. One in six experienced some form of homelessness. The percentage of workers facing these challenges increased the more unpredictable their schedules were. Even something as simple as posting scheduled in advance made a significant difference - 36 percent of workers that got their schedules within days of their shift went hungry, compared to 28 percent to those that had a two-week notice. The figures for homelessness and other

³ https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COVIDUpdate_Brief_Final.pdf

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<https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/its-about-time-how-work-schedule-instability-matters-for-workers-families-and-racial-inequality/>

hardships [paint a similar picture](#)⁵. Researchers also found correlations between [unstable schedules and poor health-related outcomes](#)⁶.

The stress derived from constantly shifting schedules goes beyond parents to impact their families. Children are especially vulnerable to stress, and unstable schedules and constantly [changing childcare arrangements](#) have an immediate effect not just on their routine, but on how they behave, and how they do in school⁷. Research has shown that children of parents with erratic schedules are considerably [more likely to feel sad or angry](#)⁸, be [https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/ still-unstable](https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/still-unstable)⁹, or even not getting adequate sleep.

The health impact on children are even more direct and immediate: children whose parents are exposed to routine schedule unpredictability and instability are more likely to have attacks of wheezing or to make visits to the ER for asthma than children whose parents worked more stable and predictable schedules.

The impact of unstable schedules on the economy

The impact of unstable, erratic schedules goes beyond workers themselves, but also extends to the companies they work for and the broader economy.

Studies have consistently shown that companies with precarious schedules have [much higher employee turnover](#)¹⁰. In contrast, companies that have worked to reduce unstable scheduling have seen [marked reductions in turnover, as well as increased productivity](#)¹¹, and lower labor costs.

Unstable schedules have impacts that go beyond individual companies and lost productivity. First, research has shown that high turnover among low-wage workers presents an obstacle to achieving financial stability, so shifting jobs hinders upward mobility. This, added to the impact of unstable schedules on children, has dire consequences for opportunity and social mobility. For many employees, working hard is not enough to get ahead, as they are constantly undermined by their own employers.

5

<https://scholar.harvard.edu/dschneider/publications/hard-times-routine-schedule-unpredictability-and-material-hardship-among>

⁶ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20200213.315417/full/>

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<https://academic.oup.com/socpro/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/socpro/spaa020/5905573?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false>

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<https://equitablegrowth.org/working-papers/parental-exposure-to-routine-work-schedule-uncertainty-and-child-behavior/>

⁹ [https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/ still-unstable](https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/still-unstable)

¹⁰ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00197939211048484>

¹¹ https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/2018_Stable_Schedules_Study_Report.pdf

The economic impact of these low-quality jobs has also a broader public health impact. The rise of “deaths of despair” (deaths by drug overdose, suicide, or alcohol) [closely follows](#) the increase of low-wage, no-benefits, employment¹². It has an immediate fiscal impact, as well, as the increased need for social programs like health insurance, SNAP, or public housing derived from erratic scheduling ends up falling on the taxpayer. We have estimated that employers of low-wage, full-time workers in Connecticut alone are subsidized to the tune of \$1.9 billion a year in SNAP and Medicaid benefits alone. Low wages are costly to everyone but the corporations that rely on them.

Above all, however, unpredictable schedules are the result of an economy that does not value or respects its workers. The underlying message to erratic shifts and on-call, part-time, low-wage jobs is that the large corporations that engage in these practices believe that their employees are disposable, not worthy of respect. Their time, their families, their lives, are less important than their bottom line.

The Fair Workweek bill as a solution

Although some companies are moving away from on-call scheduling, this trend is not happening fast enough. The proposed legislation under consideration by this committee, H.B. 5353, is necessary to bring forward these changes, and provide workers the stability they need.

Fair Workweek laws and ordinances have passed in [New York](#)¹³, [Seattle](#)¹⁴, [Philadelphia](#)¹⁵, and [San Francisco](#)¹⁶. Oregon [passed a bill in 2017](#)¹⁷, although with a more limited scope than the present bill. Research has shown that the impact on workers has been overwhelmingly positive, with no downsides for the business impacted by the legislation. The legislation has also proven effective to give part time workers access to additional shifts, as employers have to offer additional shifts to current employees before hiring more part-time workers.

[In their evaluation of the Seattle ordinance](#)¹⁸, the Shift project found that not only was it effective in reducing schedule instability, but that it created an immediate, positive impact on

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<https://www.vox.com/2020/4/15/21214734/deaths-of-despair-coronavirus-covid-19-angus-deaton-anne-casse-americans-deaths>

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<https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/372-17/mayor-de-blasio-speaker-mark-viverito-that-new-york-city-the-largest-city-end#/0>

¹⁴ https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/LaborStandards/OLS_SS_one-pager_04-26-17.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.phila.gov/documents/fair-workweek-resources/>

¹⁶ <https://resources.harri.com/role/hr/explained-san-francisco-fair-workweek-regulations/>

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<http://www.fairworkweek.org/news-bedford/2017/8/10/slate-malls-and-restaurants-schedule-workers-at-the-last-minute-oregon-just-made-that-illegal>

¹⁸ <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2107828118>

the well being of workers. In particular, they found a marked increase in workers' reports of happiness (seven point increase), a large drop in the share of workers reporting material hardships, like hunger or homelessness (ten point decrease), and a big increase in the share of workers that were able to sleep well at night (11 points increase)¹⁹.

There are not many social programs, let alone policies, that can lead to a drop of deep poverty, let alone make people sleep better at night. Respecting workers' time and schedules by implementing a Fair Workweek bill does that.

In Connecticut, hundreds of thousands of low wage hourly workers, many earning poverty wages, struggle to earn a stable income because of unpredictable work schedules. This Committee can start the process to change this today. The Fair Workweek Bill will ensure that many of these workers have access to a stable job that respects them and their families and gives them a path to opportunity.

I urge you to vote in support of this legislation.

Additional bills

In addition to H.B. 5353, Connecticut Working Families also wants to express its support for the following bills in front of this committee today: H.B. 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers, S.B. 318, and Act Concerning Captive Audience Meetings, and S.B. 312, An Act Concerning the Expansion of Connecticut Paid Sick Days.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

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¹⁹https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/CityAuditor/auditreports/SSO_EvaluationYear1Report_122019.pdf