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Testimony of Rochelle Palache, District Director and Vice President 32BJ SEIU

March 8, 2022

HB 5356 An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers

HB 5353 An Act Concerning a Fair Work Week Schedule

SB 314 An Act Concerning Protection of Warehouse Workers

SB 312 An Act Concerning the Expansion of Connecticut Paid Sick Days

Thank you to Labor and Public Employees Committee for holding today's hearing. My name is Rochelle Palache and I am the Connecticut state director and a vice president of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 4,500 persons in the state of Connecticut and 175,000 members up and down the East Coast.

I'm here today to ask you to stand with us in support of working families by voting for the passage of HB 5356, HB 5353, SB 314, and SB 312.

HB 5356 would provide Connecticut's essential workers with a pandemic pay bonus for time worked during the depths of the pandemic. These workers put their lives at risk being employed in frontline roles that exposed them to substantially higher risks of contracting Covid-19, often prior to the emergence of treatments and vaccinations. Despite much public rhetoric recognizing our essential workers and labeling them heroes, these workers have not been concretely rewarded for their actions. HB 5356 would finally match rhetoric and practice and provide some official recognition for our essential workforce.

HB 5353 would provide retail and food service employees with much needed stability. These workers often have to deal with erratic and unpredictable schedules, meaning that workers must be on hold for their employers even when they are not "on the clock." Workers are unable to plan to improve their lives as their unstable schedules means they cannot take classes to improve their skills, take a second job, or even set up medical appointments for themselves or their family members.

SB 314 would protect the rights of employees at large warehouses from unrealistic quotas. With the rise of e-commerce, we have seen increased pressures on warehouse workers to move products as fast as possible, unfortunately these pressures have led some employers to set such high quotas that employees can only meet them by going without bathroom or meal breaks, or by violating OSHA rules. We must act to protect the dignity of these workers.

SB 312 would modernize Connecticut's Paid Sick Days law by expanding it beyond service workers and expanding the scope of covered family members. Employers are also required to provide all paid sick leave that an employee is expected to earn in a year, at the beginning of this year. To address future pandemics, leave may now be used when a business or schools are closed due to a public health emergency or when an employee or an employee's family needs to quarantine. Employers would not be permitted to require documentation pertaining to family violence or sexual assault. SB 312 would update current law to include current best standards, greatly benefitting our state's workforce.

Please stand with us and support these bills that would protect the rights of Connecticut workers. We ask that you stand with our state's working families by passing HB 5356, HB 5353, SB 314, and SB 312.