

March 8, 2022

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Mary Jane Massimino. I am a union steward at Stop & Shop Supermarkets and I am also an Executive Board member of my union. I am here to speak in favor of Raised Bill 317, **AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING EMPLOYEES**. Thank you for your time and for holding a public hearing on this bill.

In 2019 we went on strike for eleven days at my supermarket. It was something I never thought I would have to do in my lifetime but we had no choice. After years of working hard and seeing so much turnover amongst employees in my store we knew we needed to improve wages. At the time that we were looking to make improvements, our employer had sent their sights on cutting our health insurance plan and our pension. We knew we had to draw a line in the sand and take a stand as a group. I wasn't sure how my coworkers would hold up without paychecks but nothing can describe the feeling of pride watching all of us streaming out of work that first day of the strike and then bonding together as true sisters and brothers over the next nearly two weeks.

That said, it was easier for some of us to survive than others. Many of my coworkers typically run out of money before their next paycheck comes and they had no idea how they would make ends meet. We were happy when the Branford food bank opened their doors just for us, and that was a lifeline for many of my coworkers. Luckily our strike ended before the two-week mark but I often wonder if we were able to stay out longer how much more we could've gained in that contract.

The contract we just settled last week is even better than the one we struggled to achieve in 2019. Some of that is because of the economy and Covid but I suspect much of it is because the union proved how strong we are and the company did not want to risk another strike. Had we had unemployment benefits to rely on during the 2019 strike we might've been able to stay out longer and gain the great contract that we just signed last week three years ago. That would've meant three more years of living wages. Workers have very little leverage when fighting to be treated better at work. Workers without a union have even less protections. If we had unemployment benefits to back us up that would've given us a little bit more leverage to fight the large multinational corporation that employs us. Every time a union member takes a stand and achieves better economic security, it lifts the wages for everyone in the industry. Giving workers a tool in their toolbox to fight for strong union contracts will help improve all jobs in Connecticut.

Thank you,  
Mary Jane Massimino  
East Haven CT