

# Labor and Public Employees Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-912  
AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATUS OF PROBATE COURT SYSTEM  
**Title:** EMPLOYEES.  
**Vote Date:** 2/16/2023  
**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable  
**PH Date:** 1/31/2023  
**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation would redefine the employment status of Probate Court employees from non-state employees to state employees, granting them the ability to collectively bargain if they so choose.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator:** She took opposition to this proposal, and raised multiple concerns, including but not limited to the potential fiscal impact that could erase a large portion of consolidation savings and lead to an increase in general fund appropriation; potential to impede elected officials authority to hire and manage their staff, which will change the nature of their relations; the proposal for two bargaining units does not address nor exempt supervisory staff; the current language of the proposed legislation does not limit the scope of collective bargaining to only wages and benefits. Additionally, she emphasized the fact that all Connecticut Probate Courts are unique to its own set of circumstances and a one size fit all approach would jeopardize its individualized structures.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Ed Hawthorne, President, CT AFL- CIO:** He offered testimony in support of this legislation. He stated that this legislation would be another step towards recognizing the value of

workers. He emphasizes PCS Employees are paid less than other state employees in similar positions, while paying more for their health insurance.

**Kay Jeanette, Chief Clerk, Derby Probate Court:** She offered her comments in support of this legislation. She stated that court workers deserve the same rights as other state employees, including equality in pay, fairness, and the ability to have a say in their benefits. She claimed that probate court clerks pay more for their benefits than Probate Court Administration employees who have collective bargaining rights. She further stated that probate clerks should be compensated in the same manner as other state employees, including PCA employees in the Probate Court System.

**Eva Bermudez Zimmerman, Organizing Director, CSEA SEIU Local 2001:** She offered testimony in support of this legislation. She stated that this legislation does not automatically force someone to join a union, but rather it gives them opportunity to decide for themselves. Furthermore, she stated that the bill does not intend to change the authority of hiring and firing workers on behalf of judges, but rather gives probate court workers the ability to obtain protections such as union security, collective bargaining, and employee representation.

**Pat Chase, Clerk, Derby Probate Court:** They offered testimony in support of this legislation. They stated their need for collective bargaining rights is based on the current lack of job security, disproportionately higher cost of health insurance in comparison to other state employees, and lack of pay increase over the course of time extending to four years.

**Travis Woodward, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001:** He offered comments in support of this legislation. He expressed his belief that this legislation gives probate court workers the choice to form a union if they so choose.

**Zak Leavy, Legislative Director, Council 4 AFSCME:** He offered comments in support of this legislation, stating all workers deserve the fundamental right to choose to collectively organize.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Elizabeth Davis, Chief Clerk, Milford-Orange Probate Court:** She expressed strong opposition towards SB 912.

**Christina Bianchi, Clerk, Milford-Orange Probate Court:** She expressed opposition towards SB 912.

**Victoria Zinycz, Assistant Clerk, Probate Court:** She expressed opposition towards collective bargaining of the Probate Courts.

**Meghan Portfolio, Manager of Research Analysis, Yankee Institute:** She offered testimony in opposition of this legislation. She highlighted claims from 2017 by the President of the Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks reporting that 85% of members either oppose or have no opinion on a similar bill proposed in 2017. She also reiterated claims by the Connecticut Council of Small Towns that this legislation would result in increased probate court costs leading to potential additional costs for municipalities.

**Karen Parzych, Chief Clerk, Madison-Guilford Probate Court:** She offered comments in opposition to this legislation. She believes passage of this legislation would result in many problems within the Probate Court System.

**Several Anonymous Probate Court Employees:** They offered comments in opposition to this legislation. They stated that other courts they have spoken to do not have knowledge of this legislation, and that the Probate Court system currently runs smoothly and are do not see the benefits of unionization for their positions.

**Reported by:**

**Date: 2/20/2023**

**Sebastian Musante, Assist. Clerk**