

Dear Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez and members of the labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Anthony Soto and I am Wage Enforcement Agent with the Connecticut Department of Labor, as well as a Chief Steward with AFSCME Council 4, Local 269. I strongly support House Bill 5854, An Act Concerning the Number of Wage and Hour Inspectors at the Labor Department.

Each year the Wage and Workplace Standards Division receives thousands of complaints from workers throughout the state alleging a full spectrum of labor standards violations. They include:

- Nonpayment of the minimum wage
- Nonpayment of overtime
- Nonpayment of all hours worked
- Nonpayment of prevailing or standard wages
- Illegal deductions from wages
- Child labor: including hours of work, working papers, and hazardous employment
- Availability of a meal period
- Electronic monitoring within the workplace
- Access to personnel file
- Breastfeeding in the workplace
- Exempt versus nonexempt employees
- Misclassification of an employee as an independent contractor

These are just a few examples of the types of cases my colleagues and I are dealing with daily.

When I began with the agency in November of 2014, we had 33 field staff including investigators, agents, and supervisors today we have 24. This is simply not enough. In addition to diminishing staffing levels, we have seen a substantial increase in complaints over the last year. These circumstances have created a backlog of cases forcing our claimants to go longer without what is rightfully theirs.

This also forces the division into a complaint driven model, meaning we are only dealing with complaints received and limits our ability for proactive and strategic enforcement. The biggest problem with such a model is that we know our most vulnerable populations do not file complaints and are therefore forced to endure these exploitative working conditions.

An increase in the number of wage and hour investigators will increase the recovery of wages, putting dollars back into the hands of the workers that earned them. It would allow for strategic enforcement in industries that have a high propensity for violations. It would allow the agency to educate workers on their rights and employers on their responsibility's. Lastly, it will level the playing field for the vast number of employers that are already doing things correctly, unscrupulous employers should not benefit from a business model that exploits their workers.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 5854 and stand with the working people of Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Soto