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**HB 5164**  
**AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Weir, and the distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Dave Weidlich Jr, I live in Wethersfield, and I am President of Local 1298 of the Communications Workers of America. Local 1298 represents more than 2000 telecommunications workers who deliver high-quality services including broadband and wireless to Connecticut families across the State. I started working for SNET in 1984 and I have been a union representative for over 30 years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of an act concerning unemployment insurance benefits.

Connecticut law favors employers during a labor dispute. Workers who make the difficult decision to go on strike are unable to access unemployment benefits because they are presumed to have left their jobs voluntarily. But if they are locked out by the employer, they can receive these safety net benefits. [An act concerning unemployment insurance benefits] adds fairness by allowing striking workers to receive unemployment benefits after two consecutive weeks. It incentivizes an employer to remain at the table and negotiate in good faith to avert a strike. If they don't, they risk increasing their unemployment insurance experience ratings if the strike lasts longer than two weeks.

No one makes the decision to strike lightly. Workers risk a loss of income and the permanent loss of their jobs, especially when replacement workers are hired. But by the time a strike vote is taken, after months of bargaining, workers usually feel that a strike may be the only option to resolve differences with their employer.

An act concerning unemployment insurance benefits will not enrich workers. Unemployment benefits are intended to help workers and their families during tough times. For most, they provide 50% wage replacement for a maximum duration of 26 weeks. It is an economic lifeline, not a lucrative bonus that encourages workers to strike or remain on strike.

Unionized workplaces raise standards for all workers. When workers strike, they fight for protections that benefit all workers. We saw that with the United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against Ford, GM and Stallantis last year. After the UAW won significant wage increases, non-union automakers were forced to increase their pay and benefits to compete. That helps all workers and strengthens our economy.

Our neighbors in New York and New Jersey already permit striking workers to access unemployment benefits. It's time for Connecticut to follow their example. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.