



Testimony of

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Labor & Public Employees Committee
March 3, 2026

SB 345 An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace, Pre- and Post-Shift Hours and Establishing a Task Force to Study Workplace Heat Safety Standards

SB 347 An Act Increasing the Threshold Amount for Felony Unemployment Compensation Fraud

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HB 5387 An Act Concerning Disclosure of Wage Ranges and Benefits on Public and Internal Job Advertisements

Good morning, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Ed Hawthorne, and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 250,000 active and retired workers in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. It is on their behalf that I testify today in support on a number of bills impacting Connecticut's workers and working families.

SB 345 An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace, Pre- and Post-Shift Hours and Establishing a Task Force to Study Workplace Heat Safety Standards

SB 345 addresses three very important issues encountered by employees in the workplace. We urge the committee to support this bill.

1. Section 1 requires an employer to provide reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for a nursing child. Breastfeeding has numerous health benefits, including providing essential nutrients and antibodies to the baby, which can help protect against illnesses and infections. It also helps nursing mothers return to work after giving birth and gives them a more manageable opportunity to balance professional and personal responsibilities. We believe this bill is a win-win for employers and employees.
2. Section 2 SB 345 amends “hours worked” in the Connecticut statute to include the time an employee spends in employer mandated security screenings. Amazon.com Inc. has a long history of requiring its warehouse employees to undergo on-site security screenings every time they enter or exit the workplace to ensure they do not steal. The screenings are often located a long walking distance from the employees’ posts and often require them to wait in long lines to have the screenings performed. Most workers are not paid for the time spent waiting or for the time spent conducting the screening processes – typically averaging between 5 and 20 minutes per occurrence. That time is extended during periods of high sale volume, such as Prime Day, when employees are screened more frequently.

Workers employed by the temporary agency Integrity Staffing Solutions to work in Amazon’s Nevada warehouse sued, taking the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Integrity Staffing Solutions v. Busk* the Supreme Court ruled that security checks were not compensable under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) because they are incidental to workers’ primary job duties. But many state wage laws are more comprehensive than the FLSA.

Pennsylvania law, for example, requires workers to be paid for “time during which an employee is required by the employer to be on the premises of the employer, to be on duty or to be at the prescribed workplace.” That provision allowed Pennsylvania Amazon employees to win a 2021 case. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that Amazon should have paid warehouse workers for time they spent in security screenings, because state law required it. In February 2023, Amazon reached a \$7.2 million settlement with the impacted workers.

This has been an ongoing issue for Amazon in a number of states, including Connecticut. In 2023, three Connecticut workers employed by Amazon at its Windsor facility sought a class action lawsuit on behalf of approximately 10,000 employees at fulfillment centers in Windsor and North Haven, claiming they were uncompensated for time spent in security checks as they left their shifts. Because Connecticut wage law was not as comprehensive as Pennsylvania’s, the Connecticut workers lost. SB 345 would erase any doubt in future proceedings – either in Department of Labor wage theft investigations or in employee lawsuits – that the time to conduct employer mandated screenings must be paid by the employer.

3. Section 3 establishes a task force to study and provide recommendations on creating heat safety workplace standards. Heat is the leading cause of weather-related deaths in the United States. Excessive heat in the workplace can cause a number of adverse health effects,

including heat stroke and even death, if not treated properly. While heat hazards impact workers in many industries, those in construction, agricultural, landscaping, and other industries where work is primarily conducted outdoors have a higher likelihood of facing hazardous heat exposure. SB 345 creates a process to identify ways in which employees can be made aware of the hazards heat can pose to their wellbeing and ensure that employers take steps to mitigate those hazards to the greatest extent possible.

SB 347 An Act Increasing the Threshold Amount for Felony Unemployment Compensation Fraud

Losing a job can be financially devastating for anyone, but especially for low-wage workers. They are more likely to live paycheck to paycheck and have little or no savings. When they are laid off or terminated, they face eviction, repossessions, and other economic hardships. Unemployment insurance is designed to be a temporary safety net by providing partial wage replacement for workers until they can return to work or find another job.

The law already prohibits workers from receiving a paycheck and unemployment benefits at the same time. However, when workers do return to work or begin a new job, it can be up to two weeks or longer, depending on the employer's payroll schedule, before they receive their first paycheck. If they continue to receive unemployment benefits during that interim period, the current statute allows them to be charged with a felony for accepting more than \$500 in excess benefits. SB 1219 would raise that threshold from \$500 to \$2,000, putting fraudulent unemployment overpayments in line with other felonies. In other criminal cases, Connecticut residents are not charged with a felony unless the value of the property in question is over \$2,000. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

SB 348 An Act Concerning Portal-to-Portal Workers' Compensation Coverage for Public Works Department Employees

Workers' compensation is often referred to as a grand bargain between workers and employers. Workers receive medical care and wage replacement benefits for covered workplace injuries, illnesses, and deaths without regard to fault or liability. In exchange, they are prohibited from suing their employers for the injuries they sustain.

Workers' compensation "reforms" passed in 1993 removed coverage for mental health injuries employees sustained on the job. In the last few years, the General Assembly has taken positive steps to remedy the situation, requiring workers' compensation to cover treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries (PTSI) for firefighters, police officers, dispatchers, EMS, and corrections personnel. Healthcare workers will also receive temporary coverage for COVID-19 pandemic-related PTSI.

Many workers who have encountered traumatic events at work are struggling with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, sleeplessness, and other mental health issues. Unless the General Assembly passes legislation allowing these ailments to be recognized as the workplace injuries they are, workers will continue to be forced to dip into their own pockets to take time off and seek treatment. Or worse, they will not get the care they need, potentially putting themselves, their co-workers, their families, and those they serve in danger. These injuries should be treated no differently than a worker's physical injury.

We support SB 348's inclusion of public works employees into the class of workers eligible to receive workers' compensation benefits for the PTSI they sustain at work, but rather than continue to address this issue in a piece meal fashion, we urge the Committee to provide this benefit to all workers.

SB 352 An Act Concerning the Minimum Fair Wage and Persons Employed at Cannabis Establishments

The General Assembly legalized recreational use of cannabis in 2021. Since then, licensed cannabis establishments have hired hundreds of employees throughout the state to cultivate and dispense recreational cannabis. UFCW represents many employees in this new industry. Since legalization, at least one cannabis retailer refused to pay employees the full minimum wage, attempting to unilaterally assert that the industry is one in which employees regularly and customarily receive tips because customers had the option of depositing gratuities into a tip jar.

Currently, state statute and the Department of Labor only recognize the restaurant and hospitality industries as those in which employees regularly and customarily receive gratuities. As such, they are permitted to pay workers a subminimum wage with the expectation that the tips they receive will bring their hourly rates to at least the full minimum wage. If they do not, the employer is required to make up the difference. Such employers must comply with detailed regulations and maintain appropriate records to ensure they comply with the law. A single cannabis employer cannot decide to pay its employees less than the full minimum wage. That is an industry-wide determination that only the Department of Labor can make after a thorough investigation and review.

SB 352 clarifies that cannabis employees shall be paid the full minimum wage, ensuring that they will not be cheated or have to file wage theft complaints with the Department of Labor. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

SB 353 An Act Concerning Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace Related to Menopause

Menopause is a natural stage of life that millions of Connecticut workers will experience, yet symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, hot flashes, anxiety, and cognitive difficulties can significantly impact job performance and daily functioning. SB 353 appropriately recognizes that menopause can create challenges at work and establishes a framework to develop reasonable workplace accommodations that help affected employees remain productive, engaged, and physically comfortable on the job. This proposal supports workers' health and well-being and makes while also reducing absenteeism, minimizing turnover, and fostering a more supportive work environment. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

SB 355 An Act Concerning Limitations on the Use of Nondisclosure Agreements

Nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) seek to achieve two things: silence workers and keep them in their current jobs. Traditionally, NDAs have been used to protect an employer's trade secrets, preventing an employee from taking proprietary information with them if they go to work for a competitor. They have also been utilized in settlements of workplace sexual harassment cases. Victims are often asked to sign an NDA to receive a financial settlement from the employer. The use of NDAs has proliferated

in recent years and they are now routinely included in standard employment hiring contracts in all kinds of industries.

Often an NDA includes a non-disparagement clause, preventing an employee from speaking against the employer or a former employer or conveying any information that would portray the employer or a former employer unfavorably. Broadly written NDAs limit employee free speech while compromising creativity, workplace health and safety and staff morale. NDAs can chill competition and entrepreneurship if they too broadly define what must remain confidential and proprietary. They can also allow hostile work environments to develop because employees are not able to speak out against ineffective management.

SB 355 penalizes employers who weaponize these contracts to stifle speech and creativity, conceal misconduct or monopolize job markets under the guise of protecting company secrets. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

SB 356 An Act Concerning Electronic Filing of Certified Payroll and Daily Logs for Certain Public Workers Projects

Connecticut prevailing wage standards ensure that workers on publicly funded projects receive fair wages and benefits. By appropriately compensating skilled workers, projects are completed at a higher standard with fewer delays. Prevailing wages support workers, their families, and local economies throughout the state. They also ensure that construction bids on public projects are awarded based on skill and ability, not on an employer's ability to exploit employees.

To implement and enforce those prevailing wage standards effectively, accurate and timely payroll information is essential. While Public Act 14-44 enabled the electronic handling of wage notices and records more than a decade ago, today's technology allows us to go further — to streamline compliance, reduce errors, improve transparency, and strengthen enforcement.

SB 356 would require certified payroll records and daily site logs to be submitted electronically and would establish a secure online system for filing and maintaining this data. This update will simplify reporting requirements for contractors and subcontractors, enhance oversight by the Department of Labor, and improve public accountability for taxpayer-funded projects. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

SB 358 An Act Concerning the Retention of Service Contract Workers

Connecticut workers employed by building-service contractors have no legal right to keep their jobs if the contractor changes or their building is sold and the new owner decides to make a change. That means that employees who have worked at a location for several years can be displaced overnight, without notice or warning. In some cases that could mean losing good wages and affordable healthcare benefits that were won in hard-won negotiations over the course of a worker's career.

Job loss devastates workers and their families, destabilizes communities, and harms the local economy, but it is even more devastating when workers are blindsided. SB 358 would temporarily protect workers by requiring building owners to provide notice to employees if there will be a change in contractors. It also requires contractors to retain the existing workforce for a transition

period of 90 days. These measures will ensure that workers can prepare for the change and have an opportunity to demonstrate their value to the new employer.

If this language is enacted, service employers will minimize disruption during a contract transition, minimize onboarding costs, and inherit a workforce with existing experience with the worksite and its tenants if they retain incumbent workers. We urge the Committee to join their colleagues from California, New Jersey and Delaware who have already passed similar legislation.

HB 5003 An Act Concerning Workforce Development and Working Conditions in the State

We thank this Committee for raising this omnibus bill that addresses so many issues that workers face. Some are also included in stand alone bills that we have already supported in this testimony, namely SB 345, SB 348, SB 351, SB 352, and SB 358. In addition, we urge the Committee to support the following:

- Section 1 acknowledges that healthcare workers face increasing levels of physical violence - a significant contributor to burnout and turnover. Trauma created by workplace violence should not be compounded by lost pay, uncovered medical bills, or depleted accrued time. This section ensures that assaulted workers receive guaranteed supports to help them remain in the field.
- Section 2 expands protections for teachers, school employees, student teachers, and higher education staff who suffer assault while performing their duties. It ensures that employees absent due to such incidents continue to receive full salary without depletion of sick, vacation, or personal leave. Like healthcare workers, educators and school employees should not bear financial consequences for injuries sustained while protecting and serving students.
- Section 3 directs the Department of Public Health to develop a reporting and alert system for incidents of patient violence against healthcare workers. Caregivers should be able to know if one of their patients has a documented history of violence. This measure will enhance worker safety by allowing healthcare workers to take appropriate precautions before encounters occur.
- Sections 11 and 12 ensure that when a volunteer firefighter or state marshal dies in the line of duty, survivors who were previously covered under a partnership plan maintain uninterrupted health coverage for at least one year, with the option to renew annually for up to five years. This continuity provides essential stability for families. For survivors whose loved one was not previously covered under such a plan, this section allows nonstate public employers to facilitate enrollment in the partnership plan, ensuring that no family is left without access to necessary health care.

Police officers and firefighters already receive line-of-duty survivor health coverage. State marshals execute arrests for the courts, serve all restraining orders, and carry out evictions in volatile environments. Their work keeps the civil, family and housing courts moving, but has become increasingly dangerous. They should be added to this statute to make sure that their families do not face medical insecurity if they are killed serving the public.

- Sections 16, 17, and 18 provide tuition waivers at public colleges and universities for police officers and firefighters. While this alone will not fully address the recruitment and retention challenges municipalities and the state face with regard to first responders, it is a welcome benefit that is long overdue.
- Section 19 directs the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHEFA) to develop a mortgage assistance program for police officers and firefighters who wish to purchase homes in the communities they serve. Affordability is a significant barrier to local residency for many public safety personnel. Like Section 19, this measure alone will not fully address first responder recruitment and retention challenges, but it is a welcome benefit that is long overdue.
- Section 20 requires the Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection to consult with the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, institutions of higher education, and stakeholders the Commissioner deems appropriate to develop a statewide law enforcement recruitment strategy. To ensure this effort is successful, we urge the Committee to amend this language to include representation of front line police officers and the unions that represent them. Those who perform law enforcement jobs in their communities every day will have valuable insights to share about how to improve law enforcement recruitment and retention.
- Section 24 strengthens oversight of Medicaid-funded self-directed home care programs administered by the Department of Social Services, requiring quarterly public reporting of the fiscal intermediary's audited financial statements, timesheet submission and processing metrics, error rates and on-time payroll data, customer service performance, and penalties assessed for contractual violations. Self-directed programs allow consumers to hire personal care attendants (PCAs) directly, but these programs are only sustainable if payroll functions operate reliably and transparently. PCAs perform critically important work. They should not be financially burdened or compromised because these programs' payroll systems do not function appropriately.
- Sections 25-29 modernize oversight of crane and hoisting equipment operations. Operators perform dangerous work in high-risk environments. They deserve the highest level of effective oversight to prevent them from job hazards and unscrupulous contractors. Section 25 expands the Examining Board for Crane Operators to increase the representation of experienced operators, strengthening technical expertise. Section 27 authorizes the issuance of stop work orders for incompetence, negligence, unsafe operation, thereby protecting workers' safety. Section 28 increases penalties, establishes mandatory fines for stop work order violations and prevents license renewal for unpaid penalties. Section 29 creates a non-lapsing account to fund crane investigations and inspections with collected fines.
- Section 38 prohibits employers from requiring employees to use accrued leave when a work shift is cancelled due to inclement weather and remote work is unavailable. This measure recognizes that when employers decide to close due to a weather emergency, employees should not be held financially responsible for that decision.

We do wish to alert the Committee that **we oppose Section 34** which requires the State Department of Education to study co-instruction models in local charter schools that would allow individuals without professional teaching certification to teach alongside certified teachers. This practice undermines Connecticut's rigorous certification standards, which ensure that teachers have the content knowledge, pedagogical training, and classroom management skills required to provide high-quality instruction. Research consistently shows that teacher preparation and

certification correlate with student achievement. Introducing uncertified instructors, even alongside certified teachers, would create inconsistencies in instruction, reduce accountability, and dilute the effectiveness of classroom learning. In addition, Section 34 would divert critical resources, time, and attention away from existing priorities, including teacher professional development, classroom supports, and evidence-based educational initiatives. At a time when schools face staffing shortages and increased demand for certified teachers, focusing on uncertified co-instruction is the wrong approach.

HB 5382 An Act Requiring the Comptroller to Conduct a Study of Health Insurance Coverage for Retired Police Officers and Firefighters

Connecticut is facing significant staffing challenges in public safety agencies across the state. Recruitment and retention of qualified police officers and firefighters are critical to our safety and quality of life. Ensuring that these professions remain respected and attractive career paths is fundamental to addressing workforce shortages.

Health insurance benefits, including coverage for retirees, is a key factor affecting both recruitment and retention. When prospective and current public safety employees see gaps in their long-term health coverage or uncertainty about benefits in retirement, it adds to the barriers in filling open positions and keeping experienced professionals on the job.

HB 5382 directs the Comptroller to conduct a comprehensive study of first responder health insurance and retiree health insurance benefits and report findings to the General Assembly. We hope this bill is the first step in ensuring that firefighters and police officers, who put their lives on the line for their communities, receive benefits that reflect the sacrifices they make each day. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

HB 5384 An Act Concerning Hazard Pensions for Certain Judicial Employees

This bill adds investigators in the Division of Public Defender Services, investigators in the Division of Criminal Justice and support service investigators in Support Enforcement Services to the definition of “hazardous duty member” for purposes of the State Employees Retirement Act. The work done by these essential employees is increasingly dangerous and we urge the Committee to support this bill.

HB 5385 An Act Concerning Undue Delay in Workers’ Compensation Claims by Police Officers and Firefighters

Much like HB 5382, this bill attempts to address challenges first responders encounter on the job. Workers’ compensation is meant to provide timely care and partial wage replacement to those injured on the job. It should not become a bureaucratic nightmare for any worker, let alone those who are charged with protecting our communities. HB 5385 would require the Workers’ Compensation Commission to study undue delays in workers’ compensation claims filed by police officers and firefighters. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

HB 5387 An Act Concerning Disclosure of Wage Ranges and Benefits on Public and Internal Job Advertisements

A recent report by the National Women's Law Center found that women in the United States who work full time, year-round are typically paid only 81 cents for every dollar paid to men. This gap in earnings translates into \$13,570 less per year in median earnings, leaving women and their families shortchanged.¹ That rate is only marginally better in Connecticut where women are paid just 84 cents paid to men for the same work.

Women in unions, working under negotiated collective bargaining agreements, are more likely to be paid higher, fairer wages and have better access to health insurance, pensions, and other benefits. More must be done to afford these same protections to non-union women.

The Connecticut AFL-CIO applauds the work done in recent years by the Connecticut General Assembly, led by this Committee, to help close the gender wage gap. Public Act 15-196 prohibited pay secrecy and Public Act 18-8 prohibited the use of salary history in the application process. Public Act 21-30 required employers to provide salary ranges for vacant positions upon request or before an initial job offer is made, upon hire or upon a change in an employee's position. HB 5387 strengthens current law by requiring employers to provide salary ranges on public and internal job postings.

Providing the salary range on job postings empowers applicants to advocate for themselves. It creates an open dialogue from the very beginning of the hiring process. When job applicants are informed, they can more successfully negotiate their compensation, which helps close the wage gap. Without that information, women often ask for less than their male counterparts, even when they are better qualified for the position. Several states, including Colorado, California and Washington have passed laws requiring salary ranges to be provided on job postings because they decrease conscious and unconscious bias related to identity, gender, race, and previous pay levels. We urge the Committee to continue its important work to close the gender wage gap by supporting this bill.

HB 5386 An Act Requiring Paycheck Transparency

Pay stubs provide employees with detailed information about their wages, taxes, benefits, and deductions and other withholdings. If an employee works overtime, receives pay differentials, hazard pay, on-call pay, or any other pay that is different than their regular wage, it can be difficult for them to track if the employer's reporting methods are confusing or unclear. HB 5386 requires employers to create a guide for employees so they can clearly understand how their compensation is recorded on their pay stubs. This is an important transparency measure that gives employees the ability to verify that they are being paid correctly. It gives employees the ability to catch payroll errors early so they can seek resolution, and it is also an effective tool to prevent wage theft. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

We would express our deep gratitude to the leaders and members of this Committee who work so hard to protect workers and support working families in Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ [2026-Window-into-the-Wage-Gap-Factsheet.pdf](#)