
Appropriations Committee
February 14, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Travis Woodward, I am an engineer with the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the president of the CSEA SEIU Local 2001 P-4 Council; a bargaining unit which includes our State's engineers, scientists, and information technology professionals.

I would like to highlight the dangerous understaffing at the DOT. We were once a robust agency of over 5,000 employees, but we have been cut to the bone. There are currently around 2,700 employees at DOT, 20% of whom will be eligible to retire in 2022. There are currently no succession plans in place to hire ahead of this exodus or balance attrition.

One of the critical services our engineers provide is oversight and inspection of the construction of our roads and bridges. Our priorities are keeping the roads safe and contractors honest. When we do not have enough staff to perform these duties, our work is outsourced to high priced, for-profit companies, many of which are not even based in Connecticut. Having a no-bid contractor oversee a low-bid contractor is quite literally the fox guarding the henhouse. When these construction contracts run over their allotted contract time, these private consulting engineers are rewarded with their own contract extensions.

I would also like to dispel the rumor that these consultant companies are to temporarily supplement the state workforce. We have consultants that have made their 30+ year careers moving from state project to state project, all while costing taxpayers 56-63% more than in-house state employees. Massive cost savings can be achieved if the work currently privatized by DOT is brought in-house. DOT's own latest reports indicate savings approaching \$100 million annually. State employees do this work better, faster, and for less while also protecting the safety of our residents and motorists.

As state employees we put public safety first, while these consultants put profits first. You may have heard of the I-84 Little Dig in the mid 2000's with drainage going to nowhere. However of bigger concern should be FIGG engineers from Florida. Last summer, OSHA released a report citing FIGG as responsible for the Florida International University pedestrian bridge collapse which killed six people. FIGG Engineers ignored abnormal cracking of the structure and put profits first. Why should that hit home? FIGG engineers have been awarded the oversight and inspection of the Arrigoni bridge reconstruction in Middletown, set to begin at the end of February.

We believe it is important to have highly trained engineers with the public's best interest at heart, and you are not going to get that by outsourcing to a company focused on its profits. Help us end this practice of the fox watching the henhouse.

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