



**Testimony of John Brady
Executive Vice President, AFT CT**

**Judiciary Committee
March 4, 2022**

SB 163 An Act Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is John Brady and I am a Registered Nurse and the Executive Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 30,000 public and private sectors employees; which includes state workers, healthcare workers, public school teachers, para-educators and school support staff, and higher education faculty and staff.

I come to you today in support of SB 163 An Act Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience.

Before I explain my experiences, I'd like to explain what it means to me to be a nurse. Being a nurse is not an occupation, it is a calling, it is a big part of who I am, a big part of my identity. Nurses are taught in school that of all our duties, the overriding duty is to advocate for our patients. Sometimes this can be difficult, such as when we see a medication or treatment ordered that appears to be in error, or a patient being discharged too early or without a proper discharge plan, or when we see the number of staff is not sufficient to safely care for our patients. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for the nurse to advocate for their patients at times like these. This is the reasoning that led to the nurses of Backus Hospital deciding to organize a union in 2012.

I was a nurse at Backus Hospital in 2012. I had started there in 1994 as a nursing assistant while I was in school. I was involved in our union organizing drive and I was the victim of several captive audience meetings. I speak from personal experience how intimidating a captive audience meeting can be.

Management will say that captive audience meetings are only an attempt to inform employees of their rights, but nothing could be further from the truth. Management holds all the power in

the employee-employer relationship. Failure to comply with an employer directive means discipline, discharge, and loss of income and security, not only for the employee, but also for the employee's family. This is truer than ever in healthcare, where consolidation has decreased the number of employers. Being blacklisted at one hospital in a chain means being unable to seek employment in any hospital in that chain. If the meeting were truly an attempt to educate and inform employees, there would be no reason that the meeting be mandatory to attend.

I faced several of these meetings, usually one on one, in our organizing drive at Backus Hospital. Each meeting required me to debrief with my union organizer afterwards, much as I would do with colleagues after traumatic case in the emergency room, such as the death of an infant. The emotional strain was much the same. In fact, that is the desired effect, to intimidate workers.

My worst meeting involved not one, but two managers cornering me in a 10-foot by 10-foot supply closet while they took turns berating me for doing "union work" instead of my nursing work and saying that my fellow nurses were complaining. The managers blocked my access to the door, and I had my back up against the wall. At one point, an employee opened the door to access supplies, but quickly retreated and closed the door. He told me later that "you could have cut the air with a knife." This experience shook me for some time to come. Even after debriefing with my organizer, it was several weeks before I felt comfortable entering that supply closet again. No one should go through what I did. No one should have their constitutional rights to organize jeopardized in such a way. No nurse should feel unable to advocate for their patients without fear of retribution. This bill would correct this horrible practice and protect workers' rights.

I thank you for your service to the people of Connecticut and ask your support for SB 163.

Thank you.