

Labor and Public Employees Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5384

AN ACT CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF WAGE AND HOUR INSPECTORS

Title: AT THE LABOR DEPARTMENT.

Vote Date: 3/19/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/5/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Labor and Public Employees Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would increase the amount of wage and hour inspectors at the Labor Department to not fewer than 22 after October 1, 2024, and not fewer than 45 after June 30, 2026. This bill follows increasing complaints of wage theft, especially amongst immigrant groups and non-English speakers. Currently the amount of time that a worker could wait to resolve a claim and see their unpaid wages could be years which for workers who are typically low paid could have devastating effects. If this bill is passed the CTDOL will be better able to address claims in a more reasonable amount of time and will disincentivize companies from using unethical business practice who currently don't believe that laws will be enforced. This bill has the potential to pay for itself or some of itself with the increase in tax revenue on improperly paid wages and fines the CTDOL can levy when enforcing labor laws.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Provided

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Alida Arreaga, Hartford Deportation Defense: Arreaga voices her support for the bill citing her own experience as an immigrant who was not paid and still has not received her own stolen wages.

Fredy Cardenas, Hartford Deportation Defense: Cardenas voices his support of the bill citing his experience as a construction worker who was unpaid for an entire year and how the

labor department has been unable to enforce the labor laws that were supposed to protect him.

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director, CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs: Dehkan on behalf of CRCJ voices their support of the bill out of a belief that laws are only valuable if they are enforced and the department of labor desperately needs more inspectors to enforce laws and ultimately protect employees.

Sarah Ganong, Director, Working Families Power: Ganong voices her support of the bill citing an inability for CT to properly enforce labor laws. Ganong emphasizes the damage of wage theft and the potential for damage it has where people could lose their housing or be unable to take care of their family because of unpaid wages. When the DOL can recover wages, it is beneficial for communities, the economy, and preserves tax income.

Xavier Gordon, President, AFSCME Council 4 Local 269: Gordon voices his support of the bill citing the lack of employees DOL has impacting their ability to address wage theft claims. Gordon believes that adding to the amount of wage inspectors will be able to more quickly address wage theft claims, make sure workers are receiving benefits, and disincentivize employers from behaving poorly.

Zak Leavy, Legislative Director, AFSCME Council 4: Leavy voices his support of the bill emphasizing the importance of returning wages to workers in a timely manner and critical role that inspectors play.

Elza Monteiro, Connecticut Worker Center: Monteiro voices her support of the bill focusing on the need for more inspectors that can speak Portuguese because the growing population in CT and the wage theft that immigrants frequently face.

Gary Pechie, Former Director: Pechie voices his support for the bill citing his experience inside the CTDOL and the vital role they play in protecting exploited workers.

Michael Rosario, Business Manager, UA Local 777: Rosario voices his support of the bill citing the need for the DOL to address complaints in a timely manner.

Constanza Segovia, Hartford Deportation Defense: Segovia voices her support of the bill citing rampant wage theft in construction, domestic work, landscaping, and restaurants. This is usually done consistently by specific employers who frequently disregard labor laws due to lack of enforcement. Segovia emphasizes the importance of hiring more inspectors to enforce the law that are already on the book and protect workers who were stolen from.

Ademar Torres, Organizer, North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters: Torres voices his support of the bill citing his experiences on carpentry work sites and the need for greater enforcement. Torres as an organizer frequently visits work sites and sees violations such as no overtime pay and paying workers under the table. Due to the amount of fraud that is happening in similar industries the DOL does not have enough workers to address all the violations, allowing workers to be exploited. The amount of fraud in the construction industry has led to a significant loss in tax revenue and is a strong reason for hiring more DOL workers.

Bella Berta Vasquez Jimenez, Member, Unidad Latina en Accion: Jimenez voices her support of the bill citing her experience with her co-workers not getting paid overtime for up to 73 hours a week. These unpaid wages forced her to take out a bad loan which has made her life much more difficult. Jimenez believes that if there was more DOL workers who were able to more quickly address these claims she would not be in the position she is in today.

Ed Hawthorne, President, CT AFL-CIO: Hawthorne voices his support of the bill citing the large number of complaints that the DOL has and their inability to address them in a timely manner. The inability to quickly address complaints emboldens employers to continue unethical practices and has help led to employers more wage theft.

Leslie Blatteau, President, NHFT Local 933: Blatteau voicer her support of the bill citing her experiences as a teacher and the damage it causes to families when workers go unpaid.

Jenny Cornejo, Community Organizer, Unidad Latina en Accion: Cornejo voices her support of the bill citing numerous examples of employers not paying wages and threatening workers who attempt to collect wages. When workers make a claim, it is not uncommon for it not to be resolved for years which is unacceptable for workers who need these wages to live and is why we need to increase DOL staffing.

Carla Esquivel, Resident of Stamford, Member of Nosotras and Connecticut for All: Esquivel voices her support of the bill citing her experience as an immigrant nanny who was paid under minimum wage on long hours. Esquivel emphasizes the amount of wage theft that goes on in the caretaker industry and how important it is to hire more theft investigators to stop this from continuing.

Kimberly Glassman, Director, Foundation for Fair Contracting: Glassman voices her support of the bill citing the importance of investigators in enforcing CT's labor laws. Glassman points out the 1,400 cases assigned to agents and the 1,000 cases unassigned of which the DOL is understaffed to handle.

John Lugo, Community Organizing Director, Unidad Latina en Accion: Lugo, on behalf of the ULA, voices his support of the bill citing how the DOL takes too long to address complaints and how it disincentivizes workers from filing them. Currently the cost to workers in getting fired is higher than the benefit of maybe getting owed wages years later, leading to more employers getting away with wage theft. It is extremely important to have more inspectors in the DOL to prevent employers from breaking laws out of a belief that there will be little punishment for doing so.

Josh Pawelek, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Society: Pawelek voices his support of the bill out of a belief that the workers who are being stolen from are vital to the economy and our failure to protect them is a failure of justice.

Karime Pimentel, Lead Organizer, Naugatuck Valley Project: Pimentel voices her support of the bill citing the many domestic workers who are unable to speak English, may be undocumented. and frequently are unpaid or improperly paid. It is important that when these people file claims that they are addressed in a timely manner to reward those in difficult situation who work up the courage to file a claim.

Silvia Salinas, Worker's Advocate, Connecticut Worker Center: Salinas voices her support of the bill citing her experience helping immigrant workers file claims. Salinas specifically mentions the difficulty non-English speaking workers have filling a claim and the amount of time it takes for a claim being resolved as strong reasons to hire more inspectors.

Tonishia Signore, Policy Director, She Leads Justice: Signore voices her support of the bill over a belief that wage theft is a serious problem that effects entire communities and hiring more investigators is a strong step to address it. Signore points out that most victims of wage theft are low wage workers who are already vulnerable and need to be better protected by the DOL.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Provided

Reported by: Noah Gulla

Date: 3/28/2024