

Testimony of

Kate Dias

Before the

Committee on Labor and Public Employees

Re:

SB 318 An Act Concerning Captive Audience Meetings

March 8, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Honorable Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished rank-and-file members of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees. My name is Kate Dias, and I am President of the Connecticut Education Association, an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

SB 318 prevents employers from holding mandatory staff meetings that include discussion about politics, religion, or unions under the threat of discipline. CEA strongly supports this bill.

This concept has come up multiple times in recent years. It's unfortunate that we must testify today in a climate where political speech has only gotten more contentious, disrespectful, and, in many cases bordering on threatening. This climate has emboldened business owners to suppress employees' free speech, including workers' rights to associate in unions. This has affected perceptions of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and diverse religious views and affiliations, resulting in bias, intimidation, and bigotry.

As a result, many employees fear being known by their employer as having positions contrary to those of their bosses, and they feel threatened when management places them in a position that pits their job against their political or religious views. This is contrary to what is widely accepted as fair labor practice, and it's unconstitutional.

SB 318 is a critically important step toward ensuring that employees' freedoms and rights will be recognized and treated equally. After all, freedom and equal treatment are fundamental American values that we teach in school.