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Connecticut Retail Network Urges Legislature to Retain Flexibility in Employee Scheduling

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The **Connecticut Retail Network**, which represents retail businesses across Connecticut, is urging state legislators to preserve flexibility in employee work schedules as being in the best interests of employees, employers and customers.

The legislature's Labor Committee is considering a proposal that would limit flexibility in scheduling by imposing what is described as a "predictable" schedule that would make schedule changes more difficult and impose rules that would limit retailers ability to adjust, modify, or adapt to the needs of customers, employees or the business.

"Many retail employees choose retail specifically because the field allows them to work a flexible schedule. Retailers consider a broad range of factors when scheduling, including employee preferences and availability," explains Tim Phelan, President of the Connecticut Retail Network. "Many retailers ask employees to provide information on their level of availability and interest in working more, or fewer, hours. Those preferences change - often. Retailers take great pride in their relationship with employees. More than in just about any other industry, retail businesses and their employees value flexibility in scheduling."

Retailers depend on store employees to provide an unparalleled in-store experience for customers. And retail employees depend on their employers to provide jobs with schedules that fit their needs, which are as varied as the people who work in retail. And can be ever-changing, on both sides of that equation, now more than ever. The bill seeks to impose predictability in perhaps the most unpredictable time in anyone's memory."

Retail businesses are an indispensable segment of the Connecticut economy, supporting more than 470,000 jobs and contributing more than \$34 billion to the state's economy. There are roughly 42,000 retail establishments in Connecticut, and in total, the retail industry produces approximately 14% of Connecticut's total GDP. More than 98% of all retail companies are small businesses, employing fewer than 50 people.

"At a time when retailers – like many other businesses – are struggling to find workers in sufficient numbers, legislation that would impose more hurdles and more obstacles is the wrong remedy at the wrong time," Phelan told legislators in testimony provided on the proposed legislation, House Bill 6859.

The market for qualified employees is already driving retailers to examine new ways to provide effective schedules, without regulatory mandates, Phelan pointed out, adding that “As the post-COVID business and workforce environment continues to evolve, innovation based on flexibility, rather than rigidity, will continue to grow – which is in everyone’s best interest. The retail industry is synonymous with flexibility.”

Retail officials urged the legislature to turn their attention to working with retail businesses in developing Connecticut’s workforce to be well-prepared for the retail jobs that remain unfilled, and those that will become available in the coming months and years.

“There will be opportunities ahead – and in many cases, those opportunities are here now – entry level jobs that can lead to fulfilling careers; good-paying jobs that can supplement income, and jobs that provide a pathway to entrepreneurship and leadership,” Phelan explained.



Recognizing the shared interest in scheduling flexibility, retailers are constantly looking for ways to have the scheduling process work more effectively. That can range from developing an app that would allow team members to see and ask for open shifts in real time, to using technology to easily allow shift swapping among employees. Those approaches are happening naturally in the industry.

The legislative proposal fails to recognize the unique needs of both businesses and their employees, as well as the negative impact that its provisions would impose on employee opportunities.

“Employers and employees in retail recognize the advantages in accommodating each other’s scheduling needs, which can change from week to week, day to day,” Phelan said. “While it may be well-intentioned, the proposed legislation would do more harm than good. The adverse impacts would hurt our businesses, our employees and ultimately our customers – and Connecticut’s efforts to achieve the economy recovery we all desire.”

To learn more about the Connecticut Retail Network, visit www.ctretailnetwork.com or call 860-527-1044.

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