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March 1, 2021

The Honorable Anastasia Williams
House Labor Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

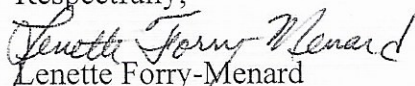
Dear Chairwoman Williams and Committee Members:

The Northern RI Chamber of Commerce (NRICC) represents businesses in the communities of Burrillville, Central Falls, Cumberland, Foster, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield, Pawtucket, Scituate, Smithfield and Woonsocket. The Chamber wishes to be on record in opposition to the passage of H.5721, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Minimum Wages. H.5721 requires employers employing fifty (50) or more employees to pay "hazard pay" to employees involved in providing essential services during a declared public health emergency. The hazard pay would be at a rate of one and one-third (1½) times the regular rate of pay.

The definition of "Essential services" under H.5721 is broad and encompassing. It includes the following businesses: (1) Agricultural equipment and supply; (2) Auto repair and supply; (3) Banks and credit unions; (4) Child care; (5) Construction; (6) Electronics and telecommunications; (7) Firearms; (8) Food and beverage stores, supermarkets and distributors, liquor stores, specialty food stores, bodegas and convenience stores, farmers' markets, food banks and pantries; (9) Funeral homes; (10) Gas stations; (11) Harm reduction organizations, recovery and treatment organizations, and organizations conducting in-person outreach with vulnerable populations such as those who use drugs, unhoused individuals and people recently released from incarceration; (12) Health care; (13) Industrial, construction equipment and supply, hardware stores, general power equipment; (14) Laundromats; (15) Pet supply; (16) Pharmacies, medical supply stores and compassion centers; (17) Printing shops, mail and delivery stores and operations and office supply businesses; (18) Professional uniform suppliers and stores; (19) Restaurants; (20) Seafood equipment and supply; (21) Security and public safety; and (22) Any commercial business, operation or entity designated as providing essential services by the director of the department of labor.

Many of these businesses are struggling to survive as their customer bases decline due to government-imposed restrictions and customer pattern changes. It is impossible to increase labor expenses while, at the same time, decreasing business revenue. The only alternative is to decrease employment or close. Unfortunately, this was a reality in 2020 and 2021 for many businesses. Others are barely hanging on. H.5721 will have the unintended consequences of placing more businesses in the employment decrease/closure category.

For these reasons, we urge this committee to not pass H.5721.

Respectfully,

Lenette Forry-Menard
Legislative Lobbyist