

Written Testimony of Jasper Cattell in Favor of House Bill No. 5305
Submitted to the House Committee on Labor
February 12, 2025

Dear Chair Corvese, Vice Chair Messier, Vice Chair Alzate, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jasper Cattell, and I am the Political Director of the Graduate Labor Organization (RIFT-AFT Local 6516) and a PhD student at Brown University. As part of the labor movement in Rhode Island, and as an academic researcher who works on labor and climate change, I would like to express my support for Bill H5305.

In recent years, Rhode Island and other states have witnessed increasingly unusual weather patterns, including extreme heat and cold that threaten the safety of workers. It is expected that such events will become more frequent and intense with worsening climate change.¹ As a result, the US federal government's National Climate Assessment expects significant increases in occupational injuries over the next several decades, resulting in illnesses and deaths in the workplace.² It also projects substantial losses in labor hours due to extreme temperatures, amounting to up to \$46 billion in heat-related lost wages by the middle of the twenty-first century nationally.³ Outdoor workers are set to be the most vulnerable, although those indoors may also be threatened when appropriate precautions are not taken.

As part of a labor organization that shares a campus and community with at-risk workers, I believe it is critical that they are protected from such threats. Yet, federal occupational safety and health regulations do not currently require employers to take specific steps to safeguard their workers from the heat and the cold. As a result, it has fallen to states to put forward extreme temperate measures for workers. So far, California, Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington have adopted standards to deal with extreme heat.

Bill H5305 would provide concrete steps to ensure that workers and employers are aware of the risks associated with extreme temperatures. By including both heat *and* cold protections, it would make Rhode Island a leader on the latter issue, which other states are yet to address. The bill would require that employers provide a range of necessary safeguards that would protect workers in dangerous conditions, including heating and cooling equipment, insulation and personal protective equipment. Outdoor workers would be provided with further protections in line with the heightened risks associated with their work.

In light of the threats posed by extreme weather and climate change, all of these measures laid out in Bill H5305 are absolutely essential. For the safety of my fellow union members and of workers in Rhode Island, I urge Members of this Committee to support Bill H5305.

¹ International Labor Organization, "Ensuring Safety and Health at Work in a Changing Climate" (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Office, 2024).

² USGCRP, "Fifth National Climate Assessment," Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. (US Global Change Research Program, Washington D.C., USA, 2023), 15-12.

³ *Ibid.*, 15-12.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jasper Cattell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jasper Cattell

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