

March 1, 2021

**Testimony of Brian Moran**

Director of Government Affairs, New England Convenience Store & Energy Marketers Association

Rhode Island General Assembly  
House Labor Committee

**RE: HB 5721 – An Act relating to labor and labor relations – minimum wages**

Chairwoman Williams, First Vice Chair Messier, Second Vice Chair Alzate, and Members of the Committee:

The New England Convenience Store & Energy Marketers Association (NECSEMA) represents Rhode Island's nearly 500 convenience stores that employ approximately 7,200 people.

As proposed, HB 5721 would require employers of 50 or more people to pay employees at rate of 1 and 1/3 their usual hourly rate for the duration of a public health emergency. State and municipal employers are exempt, and employers would be liable for any unlawful labor practices if an employee refuses to work.

**NECSEMA is opposed to HB 5721.** The sacrifices made by employees and employers in the private and public sector continue to be remarkable; however, the necessity for this bill is not warranted. Widespread vaccinations are underway, and public health experts predict they will be completed this summer and fall.

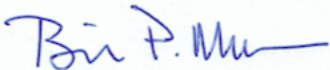
During the pandemic, many employers both large and small provided their workers with bonuses, temporary wage increases, gift cards, paid time off while in quarantine or sickness, all to acknowledge their loyalty and sacrifice. For any organization to attract and retain reliable and quality employees, these actions were not only necessary during the circumstances posed by the pandemic, but are for many employers, a fundamental part of their ongoing business model. For the state to dictate these business models, especially while excluding state and municipal employers, is inappropriate and may even hinder or limit the generous responses many employees received.

The triggering event associated with the hazard pay increase is grounded in the Governor's broad authority to invoke a state of emergency. Confusion exists on whether any emergency declaration would trigger this wage increase or not. For example, during a community wide boil water order, mosquito borne illness, a snowstorm, or other statewide or localized weather-related event?

While we appreciate the well-intentioned efforts behind this bill, we cannot support it as proposed.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our positions on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



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