



Joint Information Forum on Benefits Cliff
Thursday, January 30th 2020
Submitted Written Testimony

My name is Amanda Wiriya and I am the Manufacturing Support Manager at Wepco Plastics. I am here as an employer, but also as someone who has been personally affected by the issue we are discussing. I was a 20 years old college student and a single parent of a two year old boy when I transitioned from my first hourly job to a salaried hospitality manager. Prior to this transition, I received WIC along with healthcare and childcare benefits that were at a higher value than the increase in my new paycheck. It was a juggling act to pay for daycare, which was necessary so I could work, as well as attend and pay for college classes that would allow me to gain better employment. To say that I am passionate about this issue would be an understatement.

Although, my story is over a decade old, this scenario still holds true for more residents in CT than it should. No single parent should have to choose between making a higher wage that is *still* not a living wage in order to support their family while keeping a barely-above minimum wage position, and healthcare and childcare benefits. This is something we see quite frequently at Wepco Plastics.

We are a family owned plastics manufacturer that is currently in the process of building the next generation of our workforce. We have spent a majority of the last three years developing new career paths and building out our partnership with the Connecticut Department of Labor's Apprenticeship program. We want to offer every individual that joins our team a fully comprehensive path to personal and professional growth. However, this becomes incredibly difficult when our employees do not have the means to provide healthcare, childcare and/or a means of transportation for their families, while making an investment in not only their future but the future of our state which relies heavily on having skilled workers to keep up with the demand of Manufacturing in CT.

Without an incentive that provides a sense of urgency for individuals to be able to grow and develop without losing essential benefits, my open positions along with many of my colleagues will remain unfilled. If an individual joins my team and is placed in a 4-year apprenticeship program, they are given an outline of what their wage increases will be over the next four years. They begin making more than minimum wage, but not always a living wage. At the end of the four years, they become a certified apprentice with the State of Connecticut, as



well as having received some type of education as a requirement for their apprentice program with a generous salary. This is a great alternative to a traditional 4-year college program. However, it's only an option if you can figure out how to sustain your family for the 4-years in between.

So I urge you today, as you consider the testimonies you have heard as well as the facts provided, to picture a single parent living in Middletown whom I would love to employ. This parent is afraid of losing the opportunity to provide healthcare for their children, daycare would become unaffordable without assistance and if anything were to happen to their one means of transportation, they would be forced to call out of work and not receive pay. Therefore, the job opportunity is turned down, and the vicious cycle is continued.

Unfortunately, this is a common story that occurs every day less than 3 miles from a company that would love to offer them more than simply a job. We want to help motivated individuals start their careers, enabling them to have a better, more prosperous life for their families.

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