

**Testimony of Caroline Raynis, AFSCME Local 269  
Labor Committee Hearing, Sept. 28, 2015**

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Good morning, members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Caroline Raynis. I am the AFSCME Local 269 Chief Steward for the Middletown region of DOL. I represent members in the Call Center, Adjudications, Appeals, and those in the Meriden and New Britain Job Centers. I, myself, am an employee in the New Britain Job Center and received a pink slip.

I respectfully address you all this morning, representing concerns of my members, myself, and those from the community in which I serve.

We were told that the two Job Centers that I am chief steward, which are Meriden and New Britain, are closing. Some DOL employees in New Britain will be moved to "vacant positions in Hartford," to start on October 5<sup>th</sup>, which thus far no one has received an official letter or notice for. All other positions in New Britain and Meriden were "targeted for layoff."

When the news of this broke, the union, the community, and lawmakers came together and we started rallying, asking: If Meriden's unemployment rate is approximately 7%, in which this statistic alone does not factor-in the long-term unemployed, the under-employed, and those who were forced to retire early, because they could not find suitable work, and the rent to for Meriden's "store-front" location costs \$1,383 a month and is only run by two-full time employees then why are we closing this office? Meriden was a model for other agencies and DOL partner agencies for years, running efficiently and effectively with minimal staff and minimal rent-space, \$9 per square foot, equaling less than \$17, 000 per year to be more precise.

We also came together for the New Britain office, with similar concerns: New Britain has an unemployment rate of approximately 8.2%. It is the eighth largest city in the state. The union, community, and lawmakers began questioning why this office would close when New Britain has grim population statistics and this office serves some of the neediest people in society. In New Britain 17% of all births are to teenage mothers. New Britain has the second highest teenage pregnancy rate, in the state, second to Bridgeport. New Britain has the fifth lowest graduation rate in the state, equating to 54% graduation rate. New Britain is the only city in the state to employ a full-time homelessness liaison. People were concerned that the other 46% who do not graduate would be hitting the Labor Market, in New Britain and that the services that DOL provides would no longer be available for them.

The New Britain DOL office also serves local businesses, matching employers with skilled employees through recruitments. Just weeks ago the office held recruitment for the new Costco, in New Britain, where over 85 people attended in a time frame that was roughly three hours in length. All of these individuals had to use computers, in the Job Center, in order to fill-out online applications, to even be considered for the positions.

It was then communicated to us that the Meriden and New Britain offices would not be closing, but would turn into affiliate American Job Centers. Essentially the Job Center work that DOL employees perform would be privatized. We were told that the centers will remain open, but will be run by our private, for-profit, corporate partner agencies. The public is receiving a mixed message.