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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HOUSING -- May 21, 2021

--Testimony of Joseph Kubetz --

IN FAVOR -- Ought to Pass - LD 1711

An Act to Enhance Enforcement of Employment Laws

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, greetings.

Good afternoon to all. Thank you for being here to talk about this important issue about how we can make our workplaces thrive for our businesses and all our fellow Mainers who work in them.

Over the years, I have had many great experiences at a variety of workplaces in Maine. I have worked in sandwich shops. I have run cash registers. I have organized activities for children at daycare centers and at childrens' summer camps, sports, games. There was a lot of fun and reward therein. I have also cleaned toilets in bathrooms. That was a soul edifying job. I've been at call centers, helping people get their holiday presents ordered. I've been at a shipping department mailing out those presents. I've worked at gas stations. I've washed dishes at restaurants, and bussed, and waited on tables. I've worked at greenhouses growing plants. I've done landscaping work. And I've worked at hospitals and doctors offices.

At many of these workplaces I've worked with incredible co-workers -- many kind, funny, hard working, service-oriented Maine folks.

I've also had a number of terrific work supervisors who have helped give me chances to work on accomplishing tasks, improving my skills, working on public speaking, and more.

And, I've also experienced and witnessed times when a company certainly had an opportunity to improve their treatment of employees. While we can find the 'silver lining' and be humble enough to look at one's own imperfections, it is also important that while we might hold employees accountable, it's critical that employers have a vested interest in being good stewards of their responsibility and leadership positions in our communities.

For example, I had one experience in 1999 wherein a Southern Maine employer asked its employees to work overtime -- without really asking us if we wanted to. What's more, the eight dollar an hour wage that we were being paid, was simply copied, and paid at that same rate, for any over-time hours worked. So if an employee worked 50 hours, they would be paid in two paychecks, one with the company name that I was hired for, the second with an artificial company that they made up. And ofcourse never told us how this worked when we applied for the job, and they never talked about it with employees at all. We occasionally did work for an hour or two at the owners' parents home, so they named the second artificial company after the owners' parents, and all over-time hours were paid 100 percent on that artificial company, even if we worked no hours there that week. Co-workers talked about this injustice, but we figured it would be too much of a bother to speak up for ourselves or pursue a legal remedy.

I've also seen employers act in an incredibly hostile and unfair way multiple times. I've witnessed supervisors belittle and emotionally abuse employees.

These are exceptions to the great employers I have mostly had, but we need to shine a bright light on what we expect for the standard of how employees can be treated in a workplace. Forcing employees to sign agreements that take away their rights is not right nor is it fair, and Maine employees serve us all well with hard work, humility, and decency.

This bill ought to pass because Maine workers deserve to have all of our rights, so that we feel valued as much as value those who we work so hard to serve well.

Joe Kubetz  
Portland

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Joe Kubetz, I am a resident of Portland and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1675.

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "Morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings. Indifference to evil is worse than evil itself. In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."  
Instead of criminalization, we need to embrace compassion.

Twenty years ago, when I was going through my own experiences with addiction, luckily I didn't get into any serious accidents or hurt anyone because I had enough supportive and kind people around me. I'm lucky that I had the opportunity to get treatment, and explore healing practices such as yoga, meditation, and learning more about nutrition.

Instead of putting people in jail, this bill would focus the shift back to connecting people with services and support that they need. We've seen how incarcerating people doesn't work. Why don't we try something different? Harsh drug laws have negative impacts on families and communities. Separating family members through incarceration causes more harm than good.

Passing this bill would mean that fewer people will be incarcerated for very minor offenses, and they would be able to receive treatment and supportive resources and services.

Thank you,  
Joe Kubetz  
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