



Connecticut AFL-CIO

FACT SHEET #2

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H.B. 5030 AAC Captive Audience Meetings

This proposed legislation will prohibit employers from coercing employees into attending or participating in meetings for the purpose of communicating the employers' position regarding **politics, religion, or labor organizing activities**. Currently employers force their employees to listen to political or religious lectures and meetings. **No existing law prohibits this coercion.**

Makes unlawful any requirement by an employer for its employees to attend an employer-sponsored meeting or participate in any communications with the employer or its agents, **where the primary purpose of which is to communicate the employer's opinion about religious, political or union organizing matters.**

PROHIBITS THE DISCHARGE OR DISCIPLINE OF AN EMPLOYEE FOR REPORTING MANDATORY COMPANY MEETINGS IN THE WORKPLACE FOR OTHER THAN COMPANY BUSINESS.

Does not limit employers free speech on any subject, rather this bill allows an employee the right to stop listening and walk away.

This type of coercion happens all the time for example, Food Processing Workers in Wilson, North Carolina Smithfield Foods is the world's largest hog processing company. Workers here tried to form a union in early and mid-1999, but they lost an NLRB election. *Human Rights Watch* interviewed workers who detailed threats by Smithfield managers in captive-audience meetings to close the plant if workers voted in favor of collective bargaining.¹

Recounting management's captive-audience meetings with workers, shipping department employee Robert Atkinson said, **"I saw about seven different videos on how the union just takes your dues, goes on strike, gets into fights and stuff. It really hurt us that the people only heard one side.** It would be a lot fairer if the union could come in and talk to us. The company has a big advantage, making people come to meetings and showing videos. A lot of people don't come to union meetings. They're scared the company will know."²

Almost without limits, employers can force workers to attend captive-audience meetings on work time. Most often, these meetings include exhortations by top managers that are carefully scripted to fall within the wide latitude afforded employers under U.S. law—allowing "predictions" but not "threats" of workplace closings, for example—to deter workers from choosing union representation. **Employers can fire workers for not attending the meetings. They can impose a "no questions or comments" rule at a captive-audience meeting, and discipline any worker who speaks up.**

¹ These unfair labor practices are described in more detail in NLRB Region 11, Order Consolidating Cases, Complaint, and Notice of Hearing, *Smithfield Foods, Inc. and United Food & Commercial Workers*, Case No. 11-CA-18316 (January 21, 2000).

² Human Rights Watch interview, Wilson, North Carolina, July 13, 1999.

Special points of interest:

- No existing law prohibits employers from forcing workers to attend anti-union and religious meetings.
- This bill would restore the Freedom of Association by giving the worker the ability to choose what non-work related meetings they will attend.