

St. Louis - Kansas City Carpenters Regional Council



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Testimony In Opposition to Senate Bill 177 Joe Hudson, Political Director St. Louis - Kansas City Carpenters' Regional Council February 16, 2021

Chairman Olson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in opposition to SB 177. While the St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters' Regional Council opposes SB 177, there are certain provisions of the bill that deserve support. Efforts to resolve the fraud the unemployment insurance system has experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a worthy endeavor. However, we do not see how limiting unemployment benefits for unemployed Kansans, particularly during this time, will address the current problems within the system. The changes to unemployment benefits within SB 177 will do nothing to alleviate unemployment fraud. Rather, it will only serve to harm Kansas working families.

SB 177 changes the rate triggers and the maximum duration for how long a claimant can receive unemployment benefits. We do not understand how changing the amount of time a claimant can receive benefits will alleviate our system's current issues. Limiting unemployment benefits during a global pandemic and growing questions surrounding workplace safety is quite simply immoral.

Additionally, SB 177 seeks to hold harmless employers who have been victims of unemployment fraud through reimbursement for fraudulent claims. While the Carpenters' Regional Council supports these efforts, we find it troubling that protections are only offered to employers. Currently, if an individual is deemed to have committed unemployment fraud, they are barred from receiving unemployment benefits for five (5) years, one of the most punitive penalties in the nation. However, there is nothing in SB 177 to ensure individuals who were the victim of these fraudulent claims will not be barred from receiving unemployment benefits for five (5) years, now or in the future. This disparity in Senate Bill 177 should be addressed.

More than 40 states have penalties for unemployment fraud barring individuals from receiving unemployment benefits for one (1) year or less. While we understand the need to deter unemployment fraud and penalize individuals that have committed real fraud, we urge you to consider amending SB 177 to remove or reduce the five (5) year ban to better align with penalties across the country.

We elect our leaders to make decisions that will benefit both the business community and local workers in each community where we live. We need to trust them to balance the interests of both business and labor. We urge you to keep this in mind as you consider Senate Bill 177. Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters' Regional Council and it's Kansas members.