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Testimony of

Jeff Leake

Before the Judiciary Committee

Re: SB 318 AA Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience

March 6, 2020

Good afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebinbas, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Jeff Leake, and I am President of the Connecticut Education Association, an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

SB 318 would prevent employers from holding mandatory meetings that include discussion about politics, religion, or unions under the threat of discipline. CEA supports this bill.

Our political environment has long been fraught with polarized political positions that have only worsened in recent years. This environment has made political speech more contentious, and political positions more intractable. It has expanded into how leaders of companies or other organizations seek to suppress employees' free speech and freedom to associate in unions. And it has bled into perceptions of diverse religious views and affiliations, resulting in bias, intimidation, and bigotry.

As a result, many employees fear being known by their employer as having positions contrary to those of their bosses, and feel threatened when management places them in a position that pits their job against their political or religious views.

SB 318 is a critically important step toward ensuring that employees' freedoms and rights will be recognized and treated equally. After all, freedom and equal treatment are fundamental American values that we teach in school.