



CONNECTICUT
HOSPITAL
ASSOCIATION TESTIMONY

OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
Friday, February 7, 2003

**HB 6211, An Act Concerning The Establishment Of Written Ergonomics
Policies For The Workplace**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 6211, An Act Concerning The Establishment Of Written Ergonomics Policies For The Workplace**.

CHA is a trade association representing acute care hospitals and other healthcare providers in the state. The Association's members are extremely concerned with the safety of their employees and the reduction of workforce related injuries. Although CHA strongly supports efforts to reduce work related injuries, we are unsure that this proposed bill will result in any true reduction of work related injury while diverting resources that could be used in other areas to protect employees and reduce injuries.

This proposed legislation will require employers, in collaboration with their employees, to evaluate the workplace environment and develop procedures to reduce musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). There is still substantial scientific debate as to the causative factors of MSDs. Many MSDs can be traced to factors other than work including genetic causes, age and activity levels. Additionally, there is no evidence that will conclusively demonstrate that incorporating an ergonomic plan will result in the reduction of injuries.

The bill further proposes that employers develop an incentive program for the reporting of early symptoms of MSDs. CHA is concerned that the incentive program will ultimately reward employees who follow unsafe work practices rather than those who have followed best practices. The incentive program will likely result in an increase in claims for work related injuries although many may not be related to employment. This will result in increased workers' compensation insurance costs for employers and a reduction in efficiency in the workplace.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) had previously proposed ergonomic standards that would have imposed similar requirements as the present bill. Congress, after much debate, rescinded the regulations determining that the resources and compliance challenges facing employers far outweigh the uncertain benefits that may have been achieved with the standards. The raised bill, as did the federal regulations, takes a "one size fits all" approach without taking into account the compliance challenges that will result in implementing this statutory scheme among all employers in the state.

OSHA, as a result of Congress' action in rescinding the ergonomic standards, has committed to taking a comprehensive approach to reducing ergonomic injuries. OSHA will be developing industry or task specific guidelines for a number of industries based upon available data including injury incidence rates. CHA believes it is more appropriate for the regulatory body responsible for workplace safety to create reasonable guidelines based upon empirical data and scientific expertise than expect an employer to develop such policies or guidelines absent these necessary resources.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

JJR:pas