

Submitter: Laurie Scop

On Behalf Of: National Workplace Bullying Coalition

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure: LC3591 and SB 851 as amended

I am submitting this personal testimony in support of LC3591 and SB851 as amended. Workplace bullying and abuse are acts of violence, and it is high time we refer to them and respond to them as the safety and health issues they are. Existing law which addresses abuse in the workplace is antiquated and restrictive, and it enables employers who retaliate with gaslighting, harassment, victim-blaming, and undue termination as a response to this ever growing epidemic. All forms of violence in the workplace, regardless of the reasons why they occur, are profoundly wrong and all too often cause irreparable mental and physical harm, if not life-threatening consequences.

My life is a testament to how workplace abuse literally disrupts and/or destroys every facet of a worker's life. Years ago, after recovering from a debilitating neurological disease that left me disabled and in a nursing home as a young woman, unexpected to recover, I was given a second chance at life and work. My new beginning was shattered as I experienced workplace abuse at one of Florida's largest emergency homeless shelters where I held a social work position. It started immediately after I was hired, and by a militant, insecure administrator who had almost no interaction with me at that time. All the while, my work was praised by several others within the hierarchy, but only on a 1:1 basis. The work culture quickly revealed itself as being one where silence was expected as a response to corruption, abuse, gross negligence, and business practices that harmed both clients and staff. After my employment was terminated, my safety net being nothing but a long history of serious illness, dreams of life as a healthy, able-bodied person, and the will to protect what had admittedly been a fragile life thus far, I ended up in a situation of homelessness myself. At that point, because of workplace abuse, I was denied shelter in the homeless Continuum of Care and left on the street to die, a retaliatory act which prompted a new journey in saving the life I once fought for.

In trying to obtain homeless services and identifying a path forward as a person without any of the general precursors to homelessness, the person responsible for most of the workplace abuse was allowed to act as the decision-maker in my mere survival. I was severely injured numerous times, repeatedly hospitalized, raped by an employee of the homeless Continuum of Care, stalked for 2.5 years by another employee who tried to coerce me into sex trafficking, and repeatedly left for dead while having to move 86 times before gaining any sense of stability. Let me be clear in telling you that workplace abuse, and its consequences, are deeply traumatic and downright lethal.

My story is one of millions, and all things considered, how could it not be a moral imperative that legislators take serious and swift action on workplace abuse? I assure you that I will continue fighting for the safety and health of all workers, in Florida and beyond, and until there is no breath left in my body. LC3591 and SB 851 are a step forward in ensuring the dignity that all workers should be afforded, and I respectfully ask that you put these vital protections in place.

Thank you.