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Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

**New York State Joint Budget Hearing, Economic Development
February 16, 2022**

My name is Josh Kellermann and I am the Director of Public Policy at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, RWDSU. We represent approximately 40,000 workers in NYS. Many of our members work in essential jobs, including in retail and grocery stores, pharmacies, food service, food processing, farms, distribution, nursing homes, catering and cafeterias, non-profit social service organizations and more.

One key issue driving the current challenges around economic development is the “employment crisis.” I have no doubt that to resolve the current employment crisis, employers need to improve the working conditions at their businesses. This includes raising wages, improving benefits, including paid time off, and increasing workplace democracy to ensure workers have a voice on the job. If this is a labor supply challenge, then businesses should adapt to increase the demand.

With that said, I’d like to turn to a few budget-related asks.

Ensure Economic Development is Fair

Public dollars should not be used to provide tax breaks to businesses without ensuring those businesses are accountable to workers, communities and the environment. Otherwise, the public pays twice: once for the subsidy and again to support workers who must take housing vouchers or food stamps to make ends meet. And, these tax breaks then force a greater tax burden on those least able to pay. We are not opposed to tax breaks, but it must be done right.

- Every economic development program should have transparency, accountability and community and labor standards as a baseline. If the program lacks these standards, it should be scrapped. The money would be better spent as direct capital spending in our communities.

Expand Access to Child Care

Working families need support to return to work. Childcare is key to effective economic development. New York State greatly expanded funding for affordable childcare for working families in the last budget, but it is still not enough. New York should lead the way in creating a universal pre-K childcare program. Such a program would make New York a national leader on supporting women and working families.

- The Childcare Facilitated Enrollment Pilot Program should also be expanded and made permanent. This program covers childcare for children up to 13 years old for low-income working families.

Increase Funding for the DOL and NY HERO

With workers still afraid to return to work due to COVID-19, it is incumbent that the state property fund the DOL to protect workers from unsafe working condition. Workers returning to safe workplaces is essential for New York's economic recovery.

- We were heartened to see Governor Hochul earmark an additional \$12.4 million for the DOL and while it is a great start, it is not enough. We need robust enforcement, deep outreach and education to workers and employers, training investments, and support for small businesses to make upgrades to protect their workers. We respectfully request \$50 million in funding to fully enforce all of NY DOL's laws. including NY HERO.

Thank you for your consideration,

Josh Kellermann
Director of Public Policy
RWDSU