Testimony of Irene Tung, PhD
Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst
National Employment Law Project (NELP)

Testifying in Support of S.B. No. 412
"AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF WAREHOUSE WORKERS"
Labor and Public Employees Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Good afternoon, Co-Chair Kushner, Co-Chair Sanchez, Ranking Members Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of S.B. No. 412 *"An Act Concerning The Protection Of Warehouse Workers"* which will provide critical safeguards for workers employed by the largest and most sophisticated warehouse companies, in particular companies such as Amazon, which use non-transparent data-driven quotas.

My name is Irene Tung, I am a Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst at the National Employment Law Project (NELP). We are a nonprofit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization specializing in employment policy.

Over the last three years, I've studied Amazon's workplace practices across the country and I am the lead author of several reports about health and safety issues at Amazon.

Our analysis of Amazon's own self-reported data to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration shows that Amazon warehouse workers in Connecticut are injured at a dramatically higher rate than other workers, and the situation is getting worse. Connecticut Amazon workers are injured at a rate of 6.4 injuries for every 100 workers, up from 6.3 in the previous year.[i] This is the equivalent of about one injury for every 15 workers. This is more than double the rate of other private-sector workers in Connecticut and 12 percent higher than the national warehousing industry average of 5.7. The overwhelming majority of injuries to Connecticut Amazon workers—98 percent—were of the most serious

kind, meaning cases severe enough that workers could not continue performing their normal job duties and had to either be transferred or take time off work to recover.[ii] This is up from 93 percent in the previous year.

I can't emphasize enough that the injuries we are talking about here—serious muscle strain injuries caused by awkward and repetitive motions without sufficient recovery time—are not only painful but are often disabling and can stay with workers their entire lives.

The high rates of serious injury at Amazon are directly attributable to the way that the company manages its workforce. It is Amazon's obsession with speed, enforced through a combination of intensive electronic surveillance and frequent discipline that has created this injury crisis for workers. Amazon's data-driven management system often keeps workers in the dark about whether or not they are adequately meeting performance standards, which are frequently changing. This system has the effect of fostering a climate of fear in which workers have to push their bodies to the brink or risk losing their jobs. And when Amazon temporarily suspended some of its productivity tracking and disciplinary policies in 2020, injury rates dropped significantly. When it reintroduced these policies later that year, the company's injury rate jumped by 20 percent, both in Connecticut and nationally.[iii] This has made it abundantly clear that these injuries are largely preventable.

What's troubling is that we've begun to see the Amazon business model spread, as other companies are pressured to adopt similar practices.

Passing S.B. No. 412 is a crucial first step to turning the tide against these harmful management practices. Most importantly, this bill establishes transparency in quotas, allows workers access to data about their performance in relation to any quotas to which they are subject and prohibits employers from using quotas to prevent workers from taking rest breaks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to you, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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[i] NELP analysis of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Injury Tracking Application data, 2022 and 2021 available at https://www.osha.gov/Establishment-Specific-Injury-and-Illness-Data. These data are self-reported by companies to OSHA. Companies are required to report any work-related injuries that require medical attention, and whether the injury caused workers to miss days of work or require a job transfer.

[ii] NELP analysis of OSHA Injury Tracking Application data, 2021 and 2022 and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Occupational Injury and Illness, 2022

[iii] OSHA Injury Tracking Application data, 2020 and 2021; CNBC (October 2020). "Amazon has resumed policies that penalize workers for taking too many breaks, just in time for Prime Day." https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/14/amazon-resumes-policy-that-dings-workers-for-taking-too-many-breaks.html and; The Strategic Organizing Center (April 2022). "The Injury Machine: How Amazon's Production System Hurts Workers." https://thesoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Injury-Machine_How-Amazons-Production-System-Hurts-Workers.pdf