Legislators and Activists Rally in Support of SB 1148; say "No More Tax Dollars for Sweatshop Goods"

For Immediate Release
May 23, 2005

Contact:
Kath Golub, No Sweat Connecticut, (cell)
Shawn Matteson, UNITE HERE, (cell)

When: Wednesday, May 25th, 11:00 AM

Where: Room 310, Capitol Building, Hartford

On Wednesday, May 25th, No Sweat Connecticut, a growing coalition of students, unions, social justice groups, and concerned citizens of Connecticut, will rally to support worker rights globally and urge the passage of SB 1148, the anti-sweatshop bill.

Karen D'Angelo, who graduated with a Master's degree from the University of Connecticut this month, said: “UConn has taken important first steps to protecting worker rights by affiliating with the Worker Rights Consortium and by creating a sweatfree section in the bookstore. Now it's time for the state to take responsibility to ensure that the products it buys with our tax dollars are not subsidizing sweatshop labor.”

Connecticut spends millions of dollars each year buying or renting uniforms for its state employees, and the state's public university systems license tens of millions of dollars worth of apparel each year. Following the precedent set by states, cities, and universities across the U.S., Connecticut is considering a law that would make it illegal for the state government and public universities to support sweatshops through their purchases with public dollars.

Some of the uniforms worn by state employees are made in workplaces where workers have a voice on the job, earn a living wage, and receive decent treatment, showing that ethical purchasing is feasible and cost-effective. However, this is not the case for all contracts. In fact, many of the products purchased by the state and licensed by universities are made under sweatshop conditions where workers earn a poverty wage and are forced to work overtime. There are also widespread violations of the workers' rights to freedom of association and there is commonly intimidation and abuse on the job.

SB 1148 would require apparel vendors selling to the state to release information on their factories and working conditions, because sweatshops thrive when they are hidden. When the Worker Rights Consortium, a non-profit independent monitoring organization, finds violations in factories producing for Connecticut, the company would have to improve conditions for further
contracts to continue. This way current suppliers would be brought into compliance with labor laws.

Other states that have adopted anti-sweatshop legislation are Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Bjorn Claeson, coordinator of SweatFree Communities, a national grassroots network, said: "These policies create significant market demand for products made in humane conditions by workers who earn living wages and are free to organize unions. Together, they help reclaim government for the public interest and put an end to sweatshops."