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State Unions Coalition Lauds Progress Toward Justice

State public service employees respond to settlement of lawsuit over former Governor John Rowland's 2003 illegal layoffs

Hartford - The State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC) issues the following statement about the settlement of the SEBAC v. Rowland lawsuit. The first paragraph is a statement of the combined SEBAC Leadership:

“By standing together, public service employees and their unions proudly opposed John Rowland’s unlawful and unconstitutional actions for over a decade. They fought for a principle dear to all Americans – that no public official can use his power to punish people just because of the group to which they belong – whether it be a union, a religion, or a political party.

“This settlement doesn’t just achieve justice -- it finally ends a dark chapter in our State’s history. Governor Rowland’s disrespect for the Constitution and the laws he swore to uphold caused terrible harm to our state. We look forward to continuing to respectfully work with leaders in an atmosphere of mutual respect for each other, but most importantly respect for the people we all proudly serve.”

Geneva Hedgecock, a member of AFSCME, was an original plaintiff in the suit, an administrative assistant/office manager at the DSS Office in Bristol that Rowland shut down in 2002-03.

“When Rowland closed our office, it was devastating. He took it out on us by shutting down programs that were fighting the hardest for their communities. He laid off some of the most vulnerable workers in those offices, like my fellow state clerical workers.

“Clients, especially the elderly, fell through the cracks and were more or less left to die because they could not get from Bristol to New Britain. Being disabled myself, I know how our clients felt, not being able to get from one place to another.

“I joined this lawsuit to serve notice that we can’t abandon those less fortunate. I hope this settlement sends a strong message to all political leaders. They need to respect the law and above all they need to respect the people.”

Lois Villa, a member of SEIU Healthcare 1199 and dental assistant caring for patients at Connecticut Valley Hospital was laid off by John Rowland in 2003. She echoed Hedgecock's sentiments:

"The financial struggle of being laid off was hard. But the hardest part was being cut off from patients I cared for. I do feel like this settlement is about justice not just for me, but for all the people who depend upon us."

Marcelle Pichanick Groves is a member of A&R, AFT Local 4200 and an original plaintiff in the suit. She was an analyst with the Department of Environmental Protection when she was laid of in 2003, and commented on the settlement:

"Edmund Burke once said 'the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.' I'd like to thank all the good men and women who helped make this settlement possible and saw to it that justice triumphed. Twelve years is a long time to wait for justice. However it is reassuring to know that our nation's legal system works."

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The State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC) unites all 16 unions representing 45,000 Connecticut state public service workers together to address important issues to all its members and the people they serve.