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POLITICS**BU students protest Gov. Cuomo's veto of SWEAT Bill**

Alex Gross/Staff Photographer

BU students arranged a protest in Downtown Binghamton against Gov. Andrew Cuomo's veto of the SWEAT Bill.

Bill aimed to address wage theft

By MELANIE GULBAS - FEBRUARY 3, 2020

Binghamton University students took a stand on Thursday in an effort to curb wage theft after Gov. Andrew Cuomo vetoed the Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) Bill on Jan. 1.

Students arranged a protest in Downtown Binghamton through Students Organizing Against Reynolds (SOAR), a multi-university student group that aims to fight for better living and working conditions, according to their Facebook page. The SWEAT Bill would let workers put a financial charge on their employers for any debt they owed the workers through withheld wages.

According to supporters, the SWEAT Bill would provide workers and the U.S. Department of Labor with the necessary tools to prevent bosses from transferring or hiding their assets. A financial charge would enable workers to put a hold on employers' property until their owed wages are paid.

Some BU students said they felt threatened when the bill was vetoed because the legislation would help them in life after graduation. Protesters held posters that read, "CUOMO: WAGE THEFT COMMANDER IN CHIEF," and "SIGN OR RESIGN."

Ryan Muller, a member of SOAR and a senior majoring in linguistics, said as a student, he felt especially betrayed when the bill was not passed.

“It’s important we care about fighting wage theft as students who often work jobs during school and are studying to get jobs in the future,” Muller said. “With the student loan crisis, rising costs of living and other growing challenges, we want a present and future where we and working people around us can protect ourselves from exploitation.”

In a Jan. 1 memo on the bill, Cuomo wrote that he did support the concept of the policy, but vetoed it because he believed it would be found unconstitutional, since the law would allow financial charges to be applied prior to judicial decisions.

The protest demonstration was held at the State Office Building in Binghamton and targeted toward Cuomo through the U.S. Department of Labor. Students, community members and organizations, including the BU Progressives and DIVEST BING, came together to protest. Muller said although they were a fairly small group, they had plenty of energy and loud voices. “I think we made more than enough noise,” Muller said.

BU students were not the only ones protesting the bill, and demonstrations occurred throughout New York state.

“After he vetoed the SWEAT Bill, us and other protesters at demonstrations in New York City and Buffalo are demanding that he stands with workers by signing the bill,” Muller said. “Otherwise, we know he stands with bosses who have stolen literally billions in wages.”

Allison Byrne, a protester and a senior majoring in geography, said she wanted to fight for better conditions for workers.

“I and many others were there to show Cuomo that as workers we will not allow him to steamroll our rights and we will not allow him to stand by as bosses steal wages,” Byrne said. “Students know that we are workers too and most of us have had wages stolen in some form or another.”

Byrne said she, along with other student protesters, are not giving up until workers’ protection is promised and the bill is signed.

“We will come back again and again to make our voices heard,” Byrne said. “Passing the SWEAT Bill will hold bosses responsible and see that as workers, we receive what we have earned.”