**Statement regarding HF291**

**February 13, 2017**

My name is Peter Nielsen. I am employed by the State of Iowa’s Department of Human Services and am a member of UE Local 893.

I have spent 15 years committed to the public sector because I believe in the critical role government plays in maintaining the foundation for a healthy, safe, and prosperous society.

I trust that everyone here and throughout the State genuinely wants to promote that robust foundation for all of Iowa to thrive. That is a fundamental, non-partisan theme that we should unite behind. The bill today presents an opportunity for us to ask if it facilitates unity in that mission to make Iowa great.

While I can sympathize with some challenges related to Chapter 20, the evidence makes it apparent that the proposed changes do not move us forward together, but instead divide us.

When I counted, there were only 9 individuals who requested to speak today in support of this bill while over 400 requests were opposed, emblematic of the thousands passing through the capitol grounds in opposition today and in the past week. Additionally, legislators have been flooded with messages of disapproval.

Where is the data showing the State’s constituents agree HF 291 remedies a perceived lack of fairness? Public employees could easily be outnumbered by those who think the original bi-partisan law needs to change, but that is not what is happening.

Despite any good intentions, passing a bill that has catalyzed such overwhelming opposition could threaten the trust Iowans have in their elected officials to work *for* the people and not *against* them.

The proposed changes will hurt an immense sector of the middle class, already experiencing a downward trend while vast amounts of wealth are funneled to the already wealthiest Americans. This bill will hurt local economies. It will disproportionately hurt women. It will hurt minorities. It will hurt veterans. It will hurt employee-employer relations, and it hurts opportunity. It is regressive for the age-old struggle for worker rights and protections.

While debating certain details of Chapter 20 may have merit, the past 40 years demonstrate its success given the rarity of contract disputes going to arbitration. The law was conceived to endorse fairness and cooperation. This bill expanding unilateral government control without allowing reasonable checks and balances, like adequate arbitration for comprehensive terms of employment, does not promote fairness or cooperation. Rather, it is a punitive template lacking support from the citizens of Iowa. I am here to ask the legislature to vote against the divisive bill, thus maintaining our united effort to move Iowa forward.

Chapter 20 and the exceptional public workforce it fosters in balanced and reasonable relationships with the employer ought not to be a point of shame, but a beacon of pride for all of us who benefit from the important services our governments offer as a foundation for prosperity.