

June 4, 2026

Members of the NH City Planning Commission & The City Services & Environmental Policy Committee,

Good evening. My name is Aldo Raymond Cupo. I am 71 years old and I am a lifelong resident of New Haven. I grew up in the Fair Haven section of town. I also lived for some years in the East Rock neighborhood, and I currently live in Westville where I, my wife and my family have lived for the past 25 years. I am also a founding member of Local 34 Federation of University Employees. I think New Haven is a great city. I'm very proud to be a New Havener. I am also proud to say that "New Haven is a UNION TOWN!"

I stand before you tonight as a New Haven resident who has had the great fortune of working directly with John Wilhelm for many years. John has been and remains, one of the best mentors I've ever been blessed to work with and learn from. In the most basic way, John gave us the tools that taught us how to organize.

Organize. People throw that word around a lot. At rallies and demonstrations, you will often hear speakers cry out "We've gotta organize!" But I'm not sure that everyone who uses that word, really understands exactly what it means. John knew its meaning and had the perfect combination of dedication and personality to teach us how to organize. Simply put, for John, organizing means talking to people - showing workers respect by listening to them, and then empowering them and pushing them to take a few steps past where they thought they were capable of going. John showed great confidence in us - certainly more confidence than we initially had in ourselves - that we,

and standing to people

the clerical & technical employees were fully capable of running our own union and bargaining great contracts with the wealthy and powerful institution of Yale University. "The company in the company town" as John often referred to them at early Local 34 meetings. With help from John and many others, we achieved excellent landmark contracts that moved our members ahead in salaries and benefits. Excellent pay and benefits that Yale could afford, but that they would not give up without a big fight.

As Cheryl testified, John went on to become President of our international union UNITE HERE in large part based on the amazing organizing he and so many others did here in New Haven. American Labor Movement activists look to New Haven as a focal point and crucial influence in Unions returning back to their rich history of grass roots organizing from the 30's and 40's. In the 70's and 80's too many American labor unions put the emphasis on figure heads instead of the membership. They focused on the individual president of a particular IU or hiring the best lawyers to bargain with the country's most rich & powerful corporations. And under this formula, many unions suffered defeats and succumbed to management demands for give-backs.

But here at Yale back in the 80's, John brought us back to the successful formula for how unions made gains in the past. In other words, grass roots one-on-one organizing. John introduced us to so many important union lessons. One was the phrase "The negotiations take place in the workplace." This idea means what happens in the

negotiating room is a direct result of what is happening in the workplace – the demonstrated strength and resolve of the workers in the departments across the campus truly determines how good or bad a contract will be. For example, if a union rep says in a bargaining session – “Our members want a higher percentage pay raise” or “an improvement in the pension plan”, but back in the offices and labs the Yale supervisors overhear workers saying “Gee, I hope the union doesn’t ask for too much” or “There’s no way I would ever go on strike” then no amount of the union rep banging on the table will get the management to take the union’s proposals seriously. This example is but one of the many important lessons that John taught us.

And so, I’d like to bring this testimony back around to the great city of New Haven. All one has to do is look at the recent Yale Post Doctoral Fellows election victory to see that the Wilhelm style of organizing is alive and well in New Haven to this day. In closing, as everyone knows – there are a number of things that have put New Haven on the map. Yale is certainly one; our famous pizza is another – but being a national leader in the American Labor Movement has also put us on the map. It is therefore fitting that the corner of College and Elm Streets be renamed John Wilhelm Corner. Thank you very much for your attention and consideration of this matter.

Alvin R. Cyw
6-4-24