



Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:
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**Connecticut Education
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Testimony of Sheila Cohen
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Regarding

**Raised Bill 7344 "An Act Concerning Recruitment
and Retention of Teachers"**

March 12, 2007

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Sheila Cohen. I am the Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association and I have taught at the elementary level for 34 years. I am here today on behalf of the members of our organization to testify in support of Raised Bill 7344 "An Act Concerning Recruitment and Retention of Teachers."

Our organization believes strongly in the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty; and in particular, minority teachers. In fact, Connecticut law cites as one of the state's educational interests that "in order to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation, each school district shall provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds..."

In January of 2001, an 18-member Commission on the Teacher and School Administration Shortage and Minority Recruitment issued a report to the General Assembly that contained many recommendations that addressed attracting and retaining teachers and administrators, especially minorities. CEA's current President, Phil Apruzzese, served as a member of this commission.

In regards to the status of minority teachers in Connecticut's public schools, the report noted the following:

According to State Department of Education (SDE) data, the proportion of minority staff is just over 7%; they are concentrated in a few districts; more than half are employed in just three districts and two-thirds are concentrated in seven priority districts; and, almost one-third of the state's 166 school districts do not employ even one minority professional staff member.

The 2005-2006 State Department of Education Minority Hiring Report indicates that the percentage of minority staff in our public schools is 7.7%; substantially less than a 1% increase over the six years since the 2001 report was released.

The report also contained 20 recommendations. Six of them addressed the issue of minority teacher recruitment. Specifically the report recommended:

1. Expansion of the minority teacher incentive program;
2. Reestablishment of a paraprofessional program;
3. Establishing a “2+2 community college transfer program”;
4. Establishing a coordinated minority teacher recruiting system;
5. Establishing and funding Praxis preparation classes; and,
6. Providing funding for future teacher clubs.

Clearly, the need for the approval and adoption of the recommendations of Raised Bill 7344 is well documented. It provides a very good mix of earlier as well as new and innovative ideas.

It calls for financial assistance for paraprofessionals who have been successful in the classroom and desire to become certified teachers. CEA supports this recommendation.

It recommends the establishment of a “fellows program” for qualified minority college graduates through a four –week intensive summer session focusing on classroom management methodology, their placement in a teaching position with a master teacher for a semester, and requiring the “fellows” to attend weekly seminars to meet the alternate route to certification (ARC) curricular requirements. CEA supports a “piloting” of this innovative modification to the states current alternate route (ARC) program.

It recommends the establishment of a program to allow minority college seniors who are majoring in a subject shortage area to receive up to three credits for working as cadet teachers in a public school and if successful entering into the “fellows program.” CEA supports a “piloting “ of this innovative strategy.

It recommends the funding of future teachers’ clubs that take affirmative steps to recruit minority students as members through a competitive grant process. CEA supports this recommendation. In fact, CEA, through its Connecticut Education Foundation, awards scholarships to qualified minority high school seniors who intend to enter the teaching profession or to minority college students who have been accepted into a Connecticut college or university teacher preparation program

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important issue and urge your passage of Raised Bill 7344 An Act Concerning the Recruitment and Retention of (Minority) Teachers.