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Regarding Raised Hou

Date:

Bill Number:

3-12-07

6990

Good morning. My name is Sharon Hagan, and I am from Mansfield Middle School, in the Mansfield School District. I am the Vice-President of our local chapter of CSEA/SEIU. I served on our negotiating team as we negotiated our first union contract and am a member of the Executive Council for CSEA/SEIU Local 2001.

I would like to thank the members of the legislator for letting a few of the paraprofessionals from CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 talk to you about the important role we play in the lives of school children in the state of Connecticut. There would have been more of us here, but they're back in their districts doing what they do best, helping a student achieve success. Maybe next time we can meet in the evening and they can tell you their stories.

In my 6 years as an Instructional Assistant I have assisted in the teaching of over 600 students per year or approximately 3,600 students while working for the Related Arts team. Related Arts consists of teaching music, art, industrial technology and family consumer science to every child in the school. I am not a special ed. IA but yet in these 6 years I have assisted and learned from those students diagnosed with ADHD, Autism, Anger Disorders, hearing loss, students learning to speak English and those dealing with typical and sometimes not so typical adolescent angst. My training has come from observing and assisting many talented and devoted teachers in my school. Professional Development in the form of computer technology training and special topics and sessions centered on IA concerns and needs, has come from an administration that cares.

I hold a B.G.S. degree from Kent State. Six years ago, I was hired in at Step 2 and paid \$8.67 an hour. Because of steps being frozen and working 1-1/2 year without a contract, I have only advanced to Step 5 on a 9-step scale and now make \$11.51 an hour. The top step is receiving \$13.69 an hour. Can you imagine your clerical help working for such pay? Can you imagine that someone who has helped shaped the future of over 3,600 students is so undervalued by their school district? Oh, and by the way when I was recently called upon to long term sub, my skills and my degree were suddenly valued at \$215.00 a day.

But my story is not so different than the many hundreds of dedicated men and women who help provide an effective education atmosphere for Connecticut school children. Many of us have degrees, (at my school 20 out of 28 have a bachelor degree or higher) None of us earn a living wage. Many of our IAs have to work a second job and go to that job when the school day ends. They cannot take advantage of Professional Development Time or staff meetings. How will they add another layer of training to this schedule? They won't. They will leave. And what a loss that will be to the students with whom they have made a connection. One of the most important things I have learned over the years is how important consistency is to our students, especially those who usually fall into the less than adequate column of NCLB. For many of these children, school is the only constant in their lives, teachers and IAs the only ones they can count on to be in the

same place every day. Consistency of staff is a valuable tool in creating an effective atmosphere for learning.

The General Assembly's recent study into the duties of school paraprofessionals should be viewed as an opening to a dialogue. Raised House Bill No. 6990 cannot and should not be the only solution and I ask you on behalf of Ct,s school children and our local school boards that you oppose this bill. Our school districts are already struggling to comply with the unfunded mandate that is No Child Left Behind. Asking districts to fund another layer of credentials is not in our school districts best interest and is not the solution to recruiting and retaining paraprofessionals. We urge this dialogue to continue and ask that the topic of raising income standards for paraprofessionals throughout the state be included in this discussion. I believe that you will find upon further investigation that this is an issue already wrapped in many levels of complexity. (Just the number of classifications for paras should be enough to make your heads spin). Please do not add another layer to an already overburdened issue. Instead invest in our state's future -- invest in higher standards for paras' wages and health care.

We are dedicated, we deeply care about the children who are the future of this state, and we want to keep our jobs.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have on issues affecting para professionals or as we refer to ourselves in Mansfield, Instructional Assistants.

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