



AFT Connecticut
A Union of Professionals

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: **John Altieri**

Date: **3/12/07**

Bill Number: **7357, 7344**

**TESTIMONY of JOHN ALTIERI
AFT CONNECTICUT**

March 12, 2007

Higher Education
Public Employees
PSRP
Teachers

EDUCATION COMMITTEE TESTIMONY RAISED BILL 7357

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for providing this hearing today.

My name is John Altieri, Jurisdictional Vice President for Teachers of AFT Connecticut, a diverse union of 26,000 members, 3,400 of whom are paraprofessionals.

I am here today to speak in favor of Raised Bill 7357: AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS, and Raised Bill 7344: AN ACT CONCERNING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS.

AFT Connecticut and the AFT have long advocated for paraeducator credentialing. We have sought to use this credential to heighten awareness in the general education arena about the important contribution and distinct skills required to assist teachers in the classroom. We have invested time and resources to provide training to paraeducators across this state. Very often professional development has been given in districts where paraeducator training is not provided. This professional development has been vigorously embraced and appreciated by our members.

Paraeducators look upon their profession with pride and feel an obligation to receive the training necessary to effectively work with students and teachers. They want to be a valued partner in continued efforts to improve the educational opportunities for all children.

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I think we can all agree that effective communication and collaboration are necessary ingredients for student success. Strong teamwork between teachers and paraprofessionals can yield positive results for all students, especially those with special needs. This is why it is so necessary for teachers to receive training in the effective use of paraeducators. Many paraeducators have worked in the school for a long time, are residents of the community, and know the staff, students, and families well. This information would be useful to all teachers, in particular, new teachers who must acclimate themselves to a new profession and environment. They should be encouraged to see the paraeducator as a valuable resource in this process.

AFT Connecticut strongly approves the passage of this legislation and thanks the committee once again for their interest in and support for paraeducator credentialing. Teachers and paraeducators with whom they work need to establish and maintain a collaborative relationship to better serve the children assigned to them. We believe that this legislation would be a step in the right direction to help this happen in districts across the state.

AFT Connecticut has supported the establishment of a program to prepare successful paraprofessionals to become certified teachers by assisting them financially. Originally this was called the "Para to Teacher" Program.

We feel that the establishment of future teachers' clubs in middle and high schools, especially recruiting minority students, is an excellent way to recruit future teachers.

Lastly, with regard to Section 2 of HB 7344, let me first say that we strongly support any initiative that would help bring minority teachers into our classrooms. However, we do have some great reservation about allowing recent college graduates to enter the teaching profession through nothing more than a four-week summer session, no matter how intensive it may be. We do believe that the pairing of a Master teacher with these teaching candidates is an excellent start and we look forward to working with you to establish a more vigorous program for achieving our shared goals.

Thank you for your time and attention.