

CAROL PARKER

TO: General Assembly Education Co

Date:

Bill Number:

3-12-07

7357

RE: Raised House Bill No. 7357, AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS

DATE: March 12, 2007

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Carol A. Parker, and I work as a public school paraprofessional at Stafford Middle School in the Stafford district. Among many duties and responsibilities, I supervise, teach, and report to administrators and educators alike on the progress of each student placed in In-School Suspension (ISS) each and every day. I work with children who are wisely placed in ISS, instead of the district sending them home for external suspension.

I want to thank the General Assernbly for commissioning last year's study of the role of paraprofessionals in our public schools. However, I respectfully urge you to **oppose** raised House Bill ~~7357~~, AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS. I do not believe that another layer of credentialing on top of the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act that does not offer real job security for paraprofessionals will resolve the crisis in our state's public schools.

I believe such a mandate will only drive down the number of paraprofessionals in our schools, which already face short-staffing and unfilled vacancies. I believe that what our schools really need are attainable solutions to the many challenges we face on the job, such as providing job related "in-services." Not every paraprofessional works in the same capacity. Some work one-on-one with students, while others work in regular educational classrooms. Some are library paraprofessionals, media paraprofessionals, special education paraprofessionals, and in my case, some work alone with students with behavioral issues.

I believe school paraprofessionals are not adequately compensated for the tremendous impact we make in the lives of the students we work with each and every day. In my own personal situation, I starting working as a paraprofessional in 1988, and today I earn \$14.11 per hour after 19 years with the Stafford Board of Education. Every time that we negotiate a raise, it is eaten by healthcare premiums, not to mention the cost of living, gas, fuel, etc. which is constantly going up. I could leave and earn more money doing other work, however, I love what I do and I know that I make an impact on every child that I service in one form or another.

I also have an Associates Degree in Social Science. I am raising my granddaughter, who I hope that I can afford to send to a college or university

someday. I believe that if you carefully look at the requirements in this bill, you cannot believe that paraprofessionals will work for the salaries that districts offer when combined with the new requirements that are proposed. The old saying is "you get what you pay for."

Working together with thousands of school paraprofessionals in CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, we have developed a simple solution that will make a difference in enhancing our profession, such as establishing a living wage, obtaining affordable health insurance, compensating paraprofessionals for obtaining additional education to better themselves in their jobs. Provide training that will benefit our paraprofessionals, and that is tailored for the specific areas paraprofessionals work in. Above, paraprofessionals must be given the respect that we rightly deserve.

I firmly believe that the real solution to closing the achievement gap for our students and recruiting and retaining the paraprofessionals our schools depend on is to support local districts so they can increase our wages and provide us access to health care. Therefore I ask you oppose HB 7857.

Thank-you for your time and for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

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