Council 4 AFSCME

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 7357, AAC Paraeducators
Education Committee, March 12, 2007

Good afternoon, Chairman Gaffey, Chairman Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am the legislative representative for Council 4 AFSCME, which represents 35,000 public and private employee members. Among these are several thousands paraprofessionals.

Council 4 strongly supports Raised Bill 7357, AAC Paraeducators. This bill creates a credentialing system for paraprofessionals, similar to what was recommended in a recent Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee report. It would create a credential for most paraprofessionals to be known as paraeducators. It also creates one for instructional paraprofessionals to be known as paraeducators plus. Currently there are about 37,000 paraprofessionals in our state. About 12,000 of them are instructional paraprofessionals.

We believe that credentialing paraprofessionals will lead to better use of their skills and talent. It will lead to more respect. Some of our members complain that the lack of a system has led to some abuse, such as using paraprofessional as substitute teachers, which they are not. Paraprofessionals are professionals in their own right and should be recognized as such.

Council 4 recommends some amending to this bill. We believe that the date for the state Department of Education to develop and issue credentials should be extended to September 1, 2008, rather than January 1, 2008. Implementing this in the middle of the school year may be disruptive. If it is done at the beginning of the school year it may make for smoother implementation.

We also request that language be added to the bill to have a committee, with paraprofessional representation, work with SDE to come up with credentialing standards and any continuing education requirement for paraeducators. Such a committee should include representation of paraprofessionals through their unions. Direct para representation in designing the credentialing will be extremely valuable in respecting the role of paraprofessionals and showing the most efficient and effective way to utilize them in teaching Connecticut's children. Commenting on a US Department of Education report, Program Review observes that "paraprofessionals can make substantial contributions to help students meet academic standards…"

Thank you for your consideration. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: Brian Anderson

Date: 3/12/07 Bill Number: 7357