

Julie
Cinnamon

Date:

3-12-07

Bill Number:

7857

TO: General Assembly Education Committee
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 Julie Cinnamon, and I work as a public school paraprofessional at Fairfield Woods Middle School in the Fairfield School district. Among my many responsibilities and duties I facilitate, re-teach, train, encourage, modify for, write task analysis, and record observations each and every day. But this is not unusual because every paraeducator does the same thing at one time or another.

Comment [M01]: Page: 1 Member's name
Comment [M02]: Page: 1 Name of school
Comment [M03]: Page: 1 Name of district

I want to thank the General Assembly 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 7857, 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 am extremely disappointed that I am unable to attend Monday's meeting so that I may speak to you face to face. However, my job is during the daytime with your children and grandchildren. I cannot take this time off, because paraeducators do not have access to substitutes for the day. It would also mean that already over-extended paraeducators would be forced to spread my workload among them. I believe that it would be in everyone's best interest to have these meetings when our voices can be heard, and we are able to supply you with answers and clarifications to questions you all might have.

Exactly one month ago, my colleagues and I were in Hartford to speak against Raised House Bill No. 6990. I regret that I cannot support RHB No. 7857 for the same reasons.

Once again, the legislation makes distinctions in certification of Paraeducators. Very little data was collected from actual paraeducators during last year's study. I also believe that the bill's grandfather clause is unattainable. The lack of access to quality, affordable healthcare is also not addressed in this legislation. Finally, there is no funding from the State for this bill.

As I reported to the Program Review and Investigations Committee last month, there should be absolutely no distinction between paraeducators. Every paraeducator is also a teacher, and every paraeducator deals with special need students sometime during the day. Who makes the decision that the paraeducator who works in the library teaching special needs children how to find a book or to write a summary of the story that was just read to them is a "Paraeducator Plus?" Who makes the decision that the paraeducator solving problems on the playground and on school buses, and facilitating social behavior during lunch for all students is only a "Paraeducator?"

The bill replaces the word "teaching" with terms like "special education" and "bilingual education," and I find this unacceptable. All paraeducators work with special education students and bilingual students.

It appears as though most of the PRI study's statistics were provided by Boards of Education. I believe you would benefit from the information received from the actual people working in the trenches.

I applaud you for adding a grandfather clause to this bill, however, as written, I believe the majority of the paraeducators in this state with five years experience would not qualify. The reason they would not qualify is that paraeducators do not receive CEUs when attending continuing education classes, which teachers do qualify for. When we attend P.D. meetings or are required to take specific classes, we do not receive formal acknowledgement. He paraeducators I work with all have completed more than thirty hours of continuing education over any given five year period, but we have no way of proving this.

Another problem with this bill is failure to address the problem of affordable healthcare. Too many paraeducators are not able to obtain healthcare through their school district or town. Others pay a very large portion of their incomes to maintain healthcare for themselves and their families. Addressing this problem would go a long way to enhance the paraeducator profession.

Finally, there is no mechanism to fund this bill's mandate. As you know, the State has sued the U.S. Government for failing to fund the No Child Left Behind Act's requirements. Why would we pass a State law that would compound this problem?

I am sure you want your children and grandchildren to have the best paraeducators to work with them and prepare them to succeed in life. However, a paraeducator's salary does not allow us to pay for the educational courses this bill would require. We already attend meetings of interest after school on our own without any compensation.

The lack of equitable salaries has left many district short handed. Without financial compensation, some paraeducators cannot live in the district they work in. It is difficult for districts to keep good paraeducators because of the poor salaries. If this bill passes, it will only become more difficult. The only specific reference to funding in the bill is fee that districts will likely force us to pay without clear direction from the State Board of Education.

The changes called for in this bill are unacceptable and inadequate. When you invest in your paraeducators, you invest in this state's future – our children. Please listen to the people who work every day with our most precious resources.

Thank you for you time and for hearing my voice on this critical issue

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