

TESTIMONY
SHARON M. PALMER
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
March 23, 2009

Good afternoon/evening Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000 member AFL-CIO union. I am here today to speak regarding three matters before you.

Bill #1142 – State Mandates - Section 6 changes indoor air quality reporting from biennially to every five years. We oppose this change. We have too many incidents in schools and public buildings of “surprise discoveries” of building problems. We must be vigilant to protect students, staff and the public. We strongly urge you to reject this change.

Bill #6686 – Teacher Mentoring. This bill has broad-based support and is the result of long deliberations by a diverse committee convened by the Commissioner of Education. It is comprehensive, substantive and ambitious, and it provides appropriate support to beginning teachers.

We wish to offer a word of caution: Connecticut had a good program with BEST as originally developed. Over time, that program was eroded by economic circumstances and changes that were not beneficial to beginning teachers. We can only hope that this will not happen again.

Bill #6688 – Education Grants. We object, as we have in the past, to the heavy-handed approach in Section 4. We do not believe real systemic change occurs with the imposition of sanctions. Real change occurs only when those affected by the change are involved, embrace it and build the capacity to make it happen.

I in our estimation, the Department of Education does not have the capacity to accomplish all that is set forth in Section 4. There are no additional appropriations and “within available appropriations” simply won’t work. We realize the bill provides for withholding district funds, but we don’t believe this will accomplish the purposes set forth in Section 4.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to appear before you.