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*Remarks of Mary Loftus Levine
Director of Policy and Professional Practice
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*Before the Education Committee
Raised Bill 6686 LCO No. 5049*

An Act Concerning the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program Act

March 23, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

I am Mary Loftus Levine, Director of Policy and Professional Practice for the Connecticut Education Association. I am here today first to thank you for your past support of our quest to develop a sound and comprehensive new teacher induction program for our state. We believe Raised Bill 6686 does just that and we respectfully ask for your continued support by voting in favor of the bill before you.

CEA has previously testified extensively and shared with legislator's research that was conducted by the New Teacher Center in California about effective mentoring programs and their potential to retain and support new teachers. The testimony of CEA's Educational Issues Specialist, Dr. Linette Branham, has been sent to you, which gives you a short summary of this work. Unfortunately, Dr. Branham could not be here today.

CEA played an active role on the Task Force that created the design for a new mentor assistance program, which we feel this bill reflects:

Linette and I conducted focus groups around the state with new teachers and mentors from rural, suburban, and urban districts to determine what teachers needed. This research was shared with the task force, along with other information we have collected and studied over the years. We were also very pleased when the Task Force brought in, upon our request, the Director of Policy from the New Teacher

Center to present best practices to our group, which also were incorporated in the report and now appear in this bill.

The bill also reflects our belief in a new framework for a program based on shared responsibilities and shared accountability for all stakeholders, with an emphasis on support and flexibility. The new structures for implementation reflect the latest thinking and movement away from a top down to a flattened world where everyone is held accountable to provide support, leading ultimately to new teachers who meet high standards and can work successfully to meet the needs of all students.

Some examples from our work and what the bill calls for are the creation of a needs assessment for new teachers, leading to the development of individualized professional growth plans, and the successful completion of modules, as evidenced by new teachers completing specific and wide ranging activities to develop skills with a focus on student learning.

This bill also reflects the consensus of all the groups who sat on and contributed to the work of the Task Force, lead by our Commissioner of Education, Mark McQuillan. The new TEAM Program is truly that – a collaborative effort. The program creates a stronger link between pre-service teacher preparation and entrance into the profession and between mentoring and professional development for ongoing learning.

Just this week, there was a front page article in Education Week which links provisions in the education stimulus funds to strong teacher induction programs. The article states the language is identical to what's in NCLB, but agrees that the focus has been so much on assessment and accountability, the federal government has ignored this important piece on teacher quality. We believe, as does the new administration in Washington, that now is the time to revisit and invest in programs such as what you have before you today.

We have already begun discussions with the State Department of Education and are willing and able to continue to work collaboratively to find ways to fund this new teacher induction program. In addition to earmarking any subsequent increases in certification fees, we need to access any available federal stimulus funds to help us build this program, which we believe will make our state, once again, a model for educational excellence.

We ask for your support of this bill as well as your leadership in asking our state to provide the investment necessary to help our districts succeed. Thank you.