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*Remarks of Mary Loftus Levine
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Before the Education Committee
Raised Bill 939 LCO No. 3312
An Act Concerning Educator Certification

Monday, March 16, 2009

My name is Mary Loftus Levine and I am the Director of Policy and Professional Practice for the Connecticut Education Association.

I am here today with Dr. Linette Branham our Educational Issues Specialist to share our concerns regarding Raised Bill 939, An Act Concerning Educator Certification. Dr. Branham has also submitted extensive testimony on this bill and is available to answer questions if the committee so requests.

We are feeling a bit of déjà vu since CEA has previously testified on an omnibus certification bill resulting from the Program Review and Investigations study on the certification process. We have been told that an amended version of that bill will be sent to your committee. It seems that certification changes are being promulgated from many sources, creating conflicting suggestions for change.

In the spirit of collaboration and in an attempt to come to consensus on the issue of policy, standards, and regulations regarding certification and professional development for our 40,000 members, we ask you to

carefully consider and reflect upon the following concepts and questions in analyzing this bill.

First, should the legislature, through this committee, cede your authority to the Executive branch by allowing the State Department of Education to unilaterally decide standards for certification and professional development? We think not. The suggested changes in CEUs do not reflect the recommendations of the fall stakeholders committee and the State Board of Education itself is divided on the issue.

Second, should you do away with teachers' due process rights regarding the granting of certificates? We pray not. In this bill, under the new section j of 10-145b, a permit or authorization holder would no longer have the right to a review if said permit or authorization application is denied, and the section which currently allows for an appeal and a hearing when a certificate has not been granted has also been removed. We strongly object to these measures.

Third, should the State Department of Education eliminate the chance for a non-public school employee to obtain a professional certificate, be allowed to dictate to local districts and teachers how much and what type of professional development must be provided and engaged in, and on top of that, potentially place the financial burden of any increase in hours required totally on teachers? We respectfully implore you not to allow these provisions to go forward. As I stated earlier, Dr. Branham's can also explain our concerns and offer a fresh perspective on what professional development could and should look like, since this is her area of specialty.

Lastly, should you lower the bar for becoming an administrator as well as for people who think they may want to become certified teachers and allow them entrance into our profession, while simultaneously raising standards for those who are already working in our classrooms (many under less than ideal conditions) who are being held personally responsible for closing the achievement gap?

We appeal to this committee's sense of fairness and your commitment to maintaining and retaining the public trust. We have all seen what happened with the BEST program when legislation was replaced by SDE's unfettered regulations.

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We ask that you allow all stakeholders the opportunity to work collaboratively to create a certification system, embedded in the laws of Connecticut, with the same high, attainable and flexible standards for all those who are or choose to be professional educators. Our students and teachers deserve nothing less. Thank you.

Appendix A

CEA opposes the following components of Raised Bill No. 939, LCO No. 3312:

1. Removes the ability of a non-public school teacher to obtain a professional certificate.
2. References throughout which transfer the authority as of 7/1/14 from the legislature to the State Department of Education to decide unilaterally:
 - a) how many and in what areas CEUs will be granted for certification; (i.e., potentially moving from 90 to 150 hours of CEU time;) and
 - b) new requirements for those holding a provisional certificate (i.e., requiring 30 graduate credits and adding 90 hours of CEUs.)
 - c) standards for those entering the profession from both in and out of state.
3. Limiting due process rights (e.g., appeals) re: denial of certificates, permits, and authorizations, and requiring action against anyone dismissed for cause.
4. Allowing the State Department of Education to lower and/or change standards for those wishing to become administrators, or those who wish to become educators; i.e., eliminating testing requirements and SAT scores as criteria.

Suggestions:

We respectfully request that a task force made up of all relevant stakeholders be created to address the issues raised in this bill and report their findings and recommendations to the Education Committee by the end of 2009 for further legislative action.