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Testimony of

Mary Loftus Levine, Director of Policy and Professional Practice
Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee
Monday, February 23, 2009

Good afternoon. 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 to share our views on Senate Bill No. 947, An Act Concerning High School Credit for Approved Online Coursework.

CEA supports the use of online coursework and in fact actively participates in Connecticut's Distance Learning Consortium. The bill before you appears to be a radical departure from current standards. Our concerns center around issues of quality, comparability, analysis, and monitoring.

We ask the committee to closely examine these criteria before accepting a bill on such a complex issue that could literally change the way education is delivered in our state.

First, the issue of quality: does the language in this proposal guarantee high quality courses? Using words like "similar" or "where appropriate" raise serious concerns.

Second, using words like "may," from our experience, opens the door to abuse and lack of comparability between in school and online courses.

Third, who will analyze these courses to ensure they are rigorous in the areas of student workload, curriculum, the level and quality of student/teacher interactions, who is trained and at what level to deliver the instruction?

Next, at a time when resources and staffing at both the State Department of Education and at the local level will most likely be seriously cut back or at best, reduced, who will monitor and how closely and carefully can and will monitoring reasonably take place?

Lastly, CEA has serious reservations about this bill allowing courses to be taught by teachers from ANY state, particularly when we continue to make our certification standards more rigorous. We have all heard cyberspace horror stories – in this case, creating potential for credits and degrees being issued from illegitimate institutions taught by unqualified people hired without background checks.

These and many other considerations warrant more inquiry, discussion, thought, and research before we add (17) simplistic lines to an existing statute. To do otherwise creates a disservice to our students and potentially serious unintended consequences.

Thank you.