

**Jennifer Alexander, ConnCAN**  
**Wednesday, February 23, 2011**

Chairs Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Vice Chairs Senator Fonfara, Representative McCrory and Ranking Members Senator Boucher and Representative Giuliano and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about House Bill 6324. My name is Jennifer Alexander. I am the Director of Research and Policy of the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, ConnCAN, a movement of concerned citizens advocating to fundamentally reform our public schools through smart public policies.

House Bill 6324, An Act Concerning Teacher Employment Criteria, attempts to provide relief from an emerging crisis in our state. In districts across Connecticut, current budget woes are beginning to trigger a wave of teacher layoffs. We are just starting to hear the grim news: Bridgeport is likely to lay off 200 teachers. New Britain will lose at least 80 teachers. New Haven expects to cut 60 teachers.<sup>1</sup> That news is going to get worse this spring and the number of layoffs statewide could be in the thousands.<sup>2</sup>

If these layoffs proceed under current policy, they will be quality blind. The newest teachers will be forced out without regard for how well they educate students, a practice commonly known as "last-in, first-out." We will lose significant numbers of great teachers, and keep ineffective ones. We will waste resources by laying off more teachers than we need to: more junior teachers are less expensive, so districts will have to let go of more teachers to balance budgets than if layoffs occurred more evenly across the teacher salary payscale.<sup>3</sup>

Quality-blind layoffs put a heavier burden on the remaining teachers, who face larger classes and more out-of-classroom responsibilities than they would if layoffs were more evenly distributed.<sup>4</sup> Quality-blind layoffs will hurt students, especially our most vulnerable students (low-income students and students of color). In fact, seniority-based layoffs have recently been shown to set back student learning by 2.5-3 months, compared to layoffs driven by teacher performance.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ctpost.com/schools/article/Lean-budget-may-change-the-face-of-the-Bridgeport-960347.php>;  
<http://www.courant.com/community/new-britain/hc-new-britain-schools-0214-20110213,0,6356812.story> ;  
[http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/layoffs\\_loom\\_in\\_school\\_budget/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/layoffs_loom_in_school_budget/)

<sup>2</sup> Rabe, Jacqueline. "Hundreds of teaching jobs still lost this year, despite federal cash infusion." Connecticut Mirror. October 28, 2010. <http://www.ctmirror.org/story/8190/hundreds-teaching-jobs-still-lost-year-despite-federal-cash-infusion>

<sup>3</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality. "Teacher Layoffs: Rethinking "Last Hired, First Fired" Policies." February 2010. [http://www.nctq.org/p/docs/nctq\\_dc\\_layoffs.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/p/docs/nctq_dc_layoffs.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The New Teacher Project. "A Smarter Teacher Layoff System." March 2010. [http://www.tntp.org/files/TNTP\\_Smarter\\_Teacher\\_Layoffs\\_Mar10.pdf](http://www.tntp.org/files/TNTP_Smarter_Teacher_Layoffs_Mar10.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Goldhaber, Dan and Theobald, Roddy. "Assessing the Determinants and Implications of Teacher Layoffs." Center for Education Data and Research. December 2010. <http://cedr.us/publications.html>.

House Bill 6324 attempts to provide districts with the flexibility to avoid making layoffs based only on seniority. However, the bill, as written, does not accomplish this goal. As written, this bill would only apply to districts that do not already have a layoff policy in place through a locally negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Right now, all districts already have such a policy in place, and virtually all prioritize seniority in layoff decisions.

House Bill 6324 does not require any changes to existing policies, even when the contracts are up for renewal. Most collective bargaining agreements contain a provision that allows the parties to keep the current agreement in effect while a new one is negotiated. So in most districts, there will never be a period of time in which there is an "absence" of a provision for a layoff procedure. Therefore, this bill, as written, will not apply in most Connecticut districts.

This bill can be strengthened. First, the State Board of Education already has the authority to intervene in this matter in emergency situations, such as school districts in corrective action. The wave of teacher layoffs looming this spring, which will disproportionately affect our most vulnerable students in these districts, should qualify as an emergency situation. I urge the Committee to ensure that this Bill strengthens existing statute so that the State Board can act now to prevent teacher dismissals based only on seniority and require that other factors, such as specialized skills and training, high-priority subject areas, student performance, teacher observations, and peer review be taken into account in layoff decisions this year. In the long term, we need a fundamental solution that ties teacher tenure to teacher effectiveness. Right now, we can, and must, do better than rely exclusively on seniority in these districts.

Finally, though its language needs to be clarified, House Bill 6324 approaches ending "last-in, first out" policies through renegotiating local collective bargaining agreements. For this approach to be effective, this Bill needs to fix binding arbitration by creating an independent pool of third party arbitrators who can effectively and efficiently resolve disputes while putting students' needs first. As we've just seen in Hartford, the current binding arbitration system has not resulted in any changes to layoff policies. Unfortunately, this ruling will result in more layoffs than Hartford should have to make and teacher and administrator "bumping" on a large scale, and could set back Hartford's reform efforts.

Let me be clear: I am not here to promote anti-teacher policies. I am proud to say that I got my start working for the American Federation of Teachers on education reform, and I fully support many of their goals. I'm here because believe it is possible to be both pro-reform and pro-teacher. It's time to move past rhetoric, roll up our sleeves and solve a very real problem. Teachers are the most important factor impacting student achievement in the classroom.<sup>6</sup> They face many challenges and deserve to be supported as the

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, Raegen, and Robin Chait. "Teacher Turnover, Tenure Policies, and the Distribution of Teacher Quality: Can High-Poverty Schools Catch a Break?" Center for American Progress. December 2008. Aaronson, Daniel, Lisa Barrow, and William Sander, "Teachers and Student Achievement in the Chicago Public High Schools." *Journal of Labor Economics* 25 (1) (2007): 95-

professionals they are. Teachers are also unique: they don't all start out at the same level of performance or rise to the same level of effectiveness over time. Yet, our current staffing policies treat teachers like entirely interchangeable widgets.<sup>7</sup> In no other professional setting, especially one so critical to the success of our children, would we make such important staffing decisions based only on the employees' amount of time on the job without regard for performance. It's time for policies that take factors other than years of service into account – this will save teacher jobs, and would be an important step towards supporting and keeping our best teachers in the classroom. Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony about House Bill 6324.

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