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*Testimony of*

*Ray Rossomando and Gloria Peduzzi  
Connecticut Education Association*

*Before the*

*Education Committee*

**Re: Senate Bill 930 An Act Concerning the School Entrance Age**  
*and*

**Senate Bill 933 An Act Concerning Substitute Teachers**

*February 23, 2011*

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Legislative Coordinator for the Connecticut Education Association, representing 40,000 teachers across the state. I am accompanied today by Gloria Peduzzi, a Connecticut Education Association UniServ Representative. Ms. Peduzzi represents teachers in discussions with their employers regarding contract negotiations, human resource concerns, and other matters affecting their employment and work environment.

We testify in opposition to SB 930 An Act Concerning the School Entrance Age as written, and in opposition of SB 933 An Act Concerning Substitute Teachers.

**SB 930 An Act Concerning the School Entrance Age**

SB 930 would change the minimum age at which a child may enter kindergarten, phasing in cutoff dates that ultimately would prohibit children who turn 5-years of age after October 1<sup>st</sup> from attending kindergarten in a public school.

Teachers of kindergarten and other early grades continually stress the importance of children in their classroom being “ready to learn” – a term that can refer to maturity levels as well as the sort of preparation that results in children knowing the alphabet, identifying colors and shapes, and understanding the basics of numeracy. Children who are ready to learn have undergone developmental maturity that makes them more likely to succeed in a formal school setting. The proposed change would increase the probability that children starting kindergarten will have reached a developmental level conducive to the rigors and socialization of the kindergarten curriculum. However, the bill does not address the challenge of ensuring that more of our young learners are prepared to begin kindergarten.

In fact, the proposed policy change enlarges a population of early learners – those turning five years of age between October 1<sup>st</sup> and January 2<sup>nd</sup> – who, under this bill, would no longer be permitted to attend kindergarten in a public school. It is the educational opportunities for this latter group for which we remain concerned.

Connecticut Education Association supports changing the school start age to ensure that more children will have undergone a level of developmental maturity that will promote success. However, it does not support this change if it is isolated from an expansion of School Readiness seats, and appropriate funding that would fulfill the educational needs of children who would be prevented from starting school as a result of this legislation.

It is critically important that children start school prepared to learn. It is doubly important for those who begin school already far behind their age-related peers. Children who do not start school prepared to learn are less likely to catch up to their peers and more likely to be victims of the achievement gap. This is the fundamental rationale for programs like Head Start and Connecticut's School Readiness program.

The distressing truth in Connecticut is that some children do not experience their first true educational opportunity until kindergarten. Others have comparatively fewer opportunities than their age-related peers. For these groups, crossing the achievement gap is already a daunting challenge. If, as a result of this bill, their first true educational opportunity is delayed another year, that journey will be all the longer.

In considering the merits of the school age change, we urge committee members to ensure that there is a continuum of age appropriate learning opportunities for all children, and especially those facing challenges, such as poverty, inextricably linked to the achievement gap.

### **SB 933 An Act Concerning Substitute Teachers**

Regarding SB 933, Connecticut Education Association opposes legislation that would lower qualification standards for substitute teachers.

Eighteen years ago, the legislature instituted quality standards that required substitute teachers to have a bachelor's degree. A waiver provision in the original 1993 legislation was removed in 2009, strengthening this quality standard consistent with efforts to ensure that students are taught by highly qualified teachers. SB 933 would roll back the improvements made in 2009, essentially reinstating the weaker, 1993 provision.

There are proponents of this legislation who may argue that lowering standards is intended to increase the availability of substitute teachers. Such solution presumes that a shortage in substitute teachers is caused by high standards. But with compensation of substitute teachers barely exceeding ten dollars an hour, and participation on substitute teachers lists a disqualifying factor for unemployment compensation, it is no wonder that there is a shortage.

Lowering standards may be one strategy for broadening a pool of candidates, but it is not the most desirable one. Increasing daily compensation commensurate with a bachelor's degree and exempting substitute teacher work from being a disqualifying factor for purposes of unemployment compensation are approaches that would more likely ensure higher standards in our classrooms.

Thank you.