Testimony of

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Before the

Education Committee

Re: <u>Raised Bill 1038 "An Act Concerning Individualized Education Programs"</u>

And
<u>Raised Bill 6434 "An Act Concerning Educators and Administrators"</u>

February 28, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Andrea Still and Representative Andrew Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Linette Branham, and I'm an Education Issues Specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. I'm here today to comment on Raised Bill 1038, An Act Concerning Individualized Education Programs, and Raised Bill 6434, An Act Concerning Educators and Administrators.

Section 2 of Bill 1038 would require all teacher candidates, no matter what their area of study, to have instruction in the development and implementation of student individualized education programs (IEPs). This mandate is unnecessary. Current law already requires teacher candidates to take a course in special education, and new pre-service teacher competencies, require all teacher candidates must demonstrate their ability to plan, implement, and assess instruction for students with a wide range of abilities and learning needs. Teaching and supporting special education students in the regular classroom is the job of every teacher; developing the IEP is the job of the special educator. Developing and implementing IEPs is already in the preparation program for special educators.

This same bill would require all special educators to earn 10 hours of continuing education unit credit (CEU) in implementing IEPs, and communicating IEPs to parents, as part of the 90-hour requirement to renew their professional educator certificates. This mandate is also unnecessary. Special education preparation programs include these topics in their course of study, and this is reinforced through the pre-service

teacher competencies as they apply to special education. The day-to-day tasks of a special educator also require them to implement IEPs and communicate with parents, which continuously refines their skills. Mandating CEUs in this area would take time from other areas of study special educators would pursue through continuing education, which would be a disservice to students in the long run.

My first comment about Raised Bill 6434 pertains to the provision of an alternate route to certification (ARC) program for school counselors. Currently, guidance counselors are required to complete a *30*-credit planned program in school counseling and either be an experienced classroom teacher, or complete a full year supervised internship prior to being awarded an initial certificate. The proposed certification regulations call for *60* semester hours of graduate credit coursework and experience, and a full year or 700-hour supervised internship for the initial certificate. An ARC program would be heavily challenged to assure that it would meet the same high standard of study and clinical practice.

In the raised bill, candidates in a school counselor ARC program would be required to have at least 40 months of experience as a school counselor, at least 10 of which are in a position requiring certification. If a person has to already hold a counselor certificate, why then, would she or he need to complete an ARC program for certification?

The raised bill also stipulates that, after a candidate completes an ARC program in school counseling and is issued the initial certificate, she or he must earn a master's degree within 5 years, or will not be eligible for the professional educator certificate. Is one to assume that the counselor must earn a master's degree in counseling or a related field, or would a master's degree in any area be acceptable? In order to assure that the counselor who completed the ARC program is as knowledgeable as those who complete more traditional planned programs at universities, this bill should specifically state that a master's degree in counseling or a related field is required.

My second area of comment on bill 6434 pertains to Section 2 (h), which would allow teacher candidates to be placed in non-public schools for their student teaching experience, as part of their teacher preparation program, and allow non-public school teachers to participate in cooperating teacher training. Such practice could be strengthened if the raised bill specifically stated that the cooperating teachers in non-public schools would be *required* to participate in cooperating teacher training, and also hold a CT educator certificate. This would be consistent with the current practice in public schools, and be most beneficial to the preparation of teacher candidates.

Finally, Section 1 of the bill would *delete* the provision that prohibits non-public school teaching experience from meeting one of the requirements for a professional educator certificate, thereby once again allowing non-public school teaching experience to lead to full CT certification. This should occur. Until 2009, CT allowed non-public school teaching experience to count, recognized non-public school teachers as educators worthy of the highest level of certification, and there is no reason not to do so.

I would like to encourage the Education Committee to re-think the language of these bills, so that unnecessary mandates are eliminated and the practices they allow are strengthened. This will benefit our students in the long run, who deserve the best we can provide them.

Thank you.