

Testimony
Education Committee
Sharon M. Palmer
February 23, 2011

Good morning Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut a diverse 28,000 member AFT-CIO Union.

There are 4 bills on which I would like to remark: SB 933, HB 6324, HB 6326, HB 6385.

We ask you to oppose SB 933, Section 10-145 and proposed changes are a perfect example of "foot in the door" or "camel's nose under the tent" legislation. In 2009 a "small change" was made to allow non-BA degree persons to substitute for 10 days or less. Now you have a proposal to allow the Commissioner of Education to waive the BA requirements. What's next? This is a slippery slope to lowered standards.

HB 6324 is called teacher employment criteria, but really is about teacher seniority. Unfortunately neither of these is what we should address. We should be working on teacher evaluation, mentoring and professional development. What we really want is highly qualified and highly effective teachers.

Some school administrators say that seniority is quality blind. We suggest those individuals need to look in the mirror and ask themselves how a teacher becomes senior if they are not a quality employee.

This bill ignores the "journey" and looks only at the "destination". It is the journey through professional development, mentoring and evaluation that make the destination of seniority a well designed path for the journey.

We urge you to reject the idea that experience does not count. There is a real risk of losing highly effective master teachers simply because budget cuts are needed and junior teachers are less expensive.

HB 6326 regarding mandatory reports of child abuse and neglect is a bill AFT Connecticut supports. The statutes have needed clarification and revision for some time. We are particularly pleased to see the requirement for training, refresher training and annual distribution of written policies. We urge your support of this bill.

Lastly, 6385, implementing the Governor's recommendations essentially covers two topics MBR and Voc-Tech high Schools.

The minimum budget requirement at the 2009 level will be very tough on districts. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school-related personnel have already made many concessions to help their school districts and significant cuts have already been made to programs. It will be difficult for districts and their employees to recover in 2014. We hope you may be able to do better.

The remainder of the bill deals primarily with the vocational technical high schools. We support the testimony of Rick Tanas, President of the State Vocational Technical Federation of Teachers. We support the concept of the voc-tech schools moving out from under the State Board of Education. Beyond that, much consideration, collaboration and census building needs to happen. We support careful study with all the stake holders at the table.

Our union's history has shown our willingness to work together to find solutions and solve problems. We stand ready to do this with you on any of these issues.

Thank you for providing this opportunity.