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Testimony of

Ray Rossomando, Legislative Coordinator

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

**Re: Senate Bill 927 An Act Concerning Requirements for Early
Childhood Educators**

February 17, 2011

Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Legislative Coordinator for the Connecticut Education Association, representing 40,000 teachers across the state.

I am here to speak about SB927 An Act Concerning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators. CEA does not support this bill in its current form.

Connecticut teachers believe that the greatest potential for Connecticut to close the achievement gap is in its ability to provide high quality educational opportunities to young learners facing the greatest obstacles. The CEA has long been a proponent of improving early childhood education by, among other goals, requiring bachelor's degrees and certification for pre-kindergarten educators.

The legislature endorsed this goal when it passed legislation phasing in a requirement for an Associate and 4-year degree in 2000 (00-187). It further moved toward the more rigorous credential of a State Department of Education certification (PA 05-245). Unfortunately, Connecticut has continually postponed reaching these goals.

SB927 changes the phase-in of higher quality credentials for early childhood educators. This potentially delays long-awaited assurances that more trained educators will be in place to help close the achievement gap affecting our youngest learners. To illustrate the proposed change, attached is a table comparing the current law phase-in of credentials with that which is proposed in SB927.

Specifically, we are concerned about three aspects of the legislation:

- 1) It permits the commissioner of Higher Education to determine which “equivalent credentials” would qualify as meeting certain professional requirements of staff. Such language is vague and risks expanding the pool of workers to those inadequately trained in early childhood education.
- 2) It changes the proportion of staff required to have a Bachelor’s Degree or SDE Certification by replacing a specific condition with a vaguer one. Current law requires “at least one person in each classroom” to possess a degree or certification. The proposed legislation replaces this condition with an unclear requirement that 50% of those with “primary responsibility for a group of children” have a Bachelor’s Degree. It is unclear who has “primary responsibility” and it appears to dilute the goal of increasing the number of highly qualified educators.
- 3) It completely eliminates the strongest credential that would be required of educators, SDE certification. According to the bill, as of 2020, a certificate would not qualify as an early educator credential, leaving the less rigorous Bachelor’s Degree as a weaker standard.

Early education is critically important for all students to reach their potential; it is doubly critical toward closing the achievement gap. At a time that we are improving standards for certification, this bill lowers the standards for pre-school. This takes us in the wrong direction.

By continually delaying higher standards for early childhood educators, we perpetuate low wages, exacerbate high turnover, and fuel a revolving door system of employment that cannot be expected to meet our expectations. At a time when we are working to Race To The Top, our preparation of early learners should not race to the bottom.

Advocates of early education have long urged the state to implement higher standards by requiring early childhood certification. Past legislatures have agreed. We urge this committee to reject any legislation that delays or compromises this goal.

Thank you.

**Phase-in of Early Educators Credentials
Current Law vs. SB927 (LCO 3110)**

Current Law prior to 2015	Current Law on or after 2015
<p>Condition: There is at least one person in each classroom who has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SDE Certificate in Early Childhood; 2. 4-Year Degrees w/ 12 credits in Early Childhood; 3. Associates w/ 12 credits in Early Childhood; or 4. Approved Credential + 12 credits in EC or Child Dvpt. 	<p>Condition: There is at least one person in each classroom who has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SDE Certificate in Early Childhood; or 2. Bachelors in Early Childhood or Child Development.

SB927 Proposed prior to 2015	SB927 Proposed on or after 2015	SB927 Proposed on or after 2020
<p>Condition: There is at least one person in each classroom who has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SDE Certificate in Early Childhood; 2. 4-Year Degrees w/ 12 credits in Early Childhood; 3. Associates w/ 12 credits in Early Childhood; or 4. Childhood Dvpt Associate Degree or Equivalent Credential. <p>(adds that credits qualify "as determined by DHE, SDE, and DSS")</p>	<p>Condition: 50% of those with "primary responsibility for a group of children" have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SDE Certificate in Early Childhood; 2. Bachelors in Early Childhood, Child Development, Child Study, or Human Growth; or 3. Remaining % have: Associate Deg. in Early Childhood, Child Development, Child Study, or Human Growth. 	<p>100% of those with "primary responsibility for a group of children" have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Eliminates requirement for SDE Certificate</u> 2. Bachelors in Early Childhood, Child Development, Child Study, or Human Growth.

Prepared by CEA