



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Monday, March 19, 2012
Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing Testimony
In Support of

House Bill 5443

"An Act Concerning Benefits for Surviving Spouses Under the Teachers' Retirement System."

Good Morning Chairmen Harp, Chairman Walker, Ranking Member Kane, Ranking Member Miner, and the members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 5443, which is designed to address a critical oversight in the current statute that denies the families of deceased teachers the pension benefits earned by their deceased relative.

I was recently contacted by Ms. Paula Fisher, a concerned colleague of Mr. Joseph Connolly, a deceased South Windsor Middle School teacher. Ms. Fisher depicted the story of Mr. Connolly's family who, beyond dealing with the grief associated with the death of a father and husband, are fighting for the full retirement benefits due to Mr. Connolly from his twenty two years of service. My understanding is that the issue originates from a seemingly slight oversight when Mr. Connolly updated his beneficiary designation through the South Windsor School System upon his marriage to his wife, nearly two decades ago. During this update he inadvertently overlooked the beneficiary designation line or box at the bottom of the page. As I understand, due to this minor and unintended oversight, the State of Connecticut is now on track to deny Mr. Connolly's family his full pension benefits.

This issue is particularly concerning because typically a pre-retirement interview would take place where a teacher would have had the opportunity to change the designation, especially in the case of a predeceased beneficiary. Because of Mr. Connolly's untimely death, he did not have the opportunity to review his retirement package and change it from his deceased father. Although not incredibly common, this issue is one that negatively affects the lives and fiscal well being of spouses and families who already are dealing with the loss of a loved one.

I am testifying with the hope that this issue can be resolved in a just way. I believe H.B. 5443 can and will correct this problem in the current retirement system. It is fair and just to allow spouses of deceased teachers, who were eligible for retirement benefits at the time of death, to collect the benefits owed, or at least the contributions made by their spouse plus interest. Further, as I understand from discussions with members of the Teacher's Retirement Board this legislation will incur no additional cost to the teachers' retirement system. I urge the committee's support of this legislation, and hope that you will favorably move it forward.

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