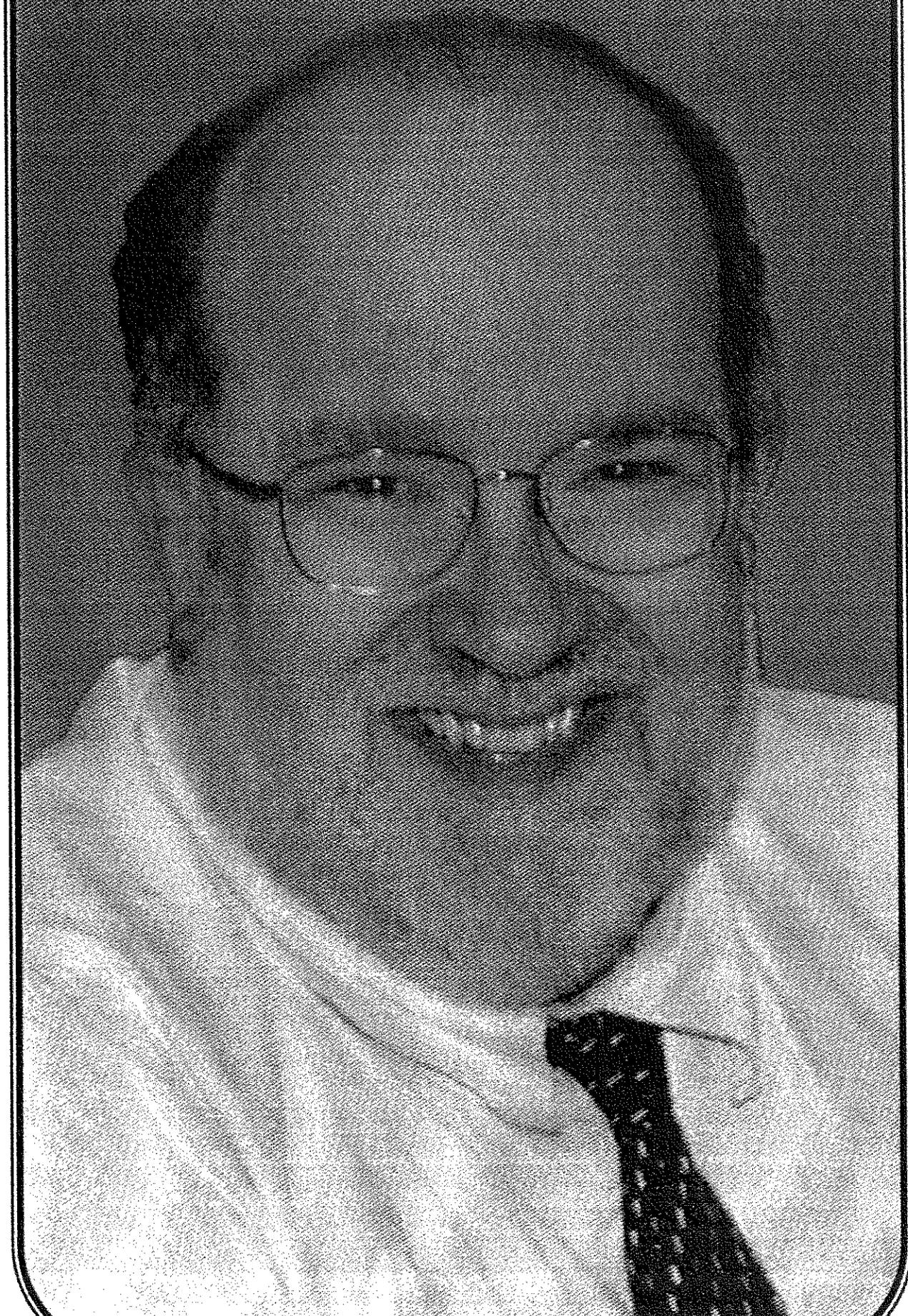


JUSTICE FOR JOE



Thank you Senator Harp and Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee for letting me speak today about Bill 5443, the Waiver of Benefit for the surviving spouse proposal. My name is Leanne Connolly, I am the widow of Joe Connolly and mother of two wonderful children Patrick, 17 and Erin, 19. On November 12, 2011 we lost my husband and their Dad, without warning. He went in the hospital and died that night.

Let me tell you about Joe. He was my best friend, the most loving husband, father, brother, uncle, friend, colleague and teacher we have all been blessed to have known and loved.

In this session, it is time to honor a 22 year veteran teacher from the South Windsor Public Schools. Joe taught 6th grade at Timothy Edwards Middle School where he loved teaching a fine group of 6th graders every year.

We lost a caring man who loved us all very much. He was also loved by many. There was an overflow of more than 800 people at his calling hours and about 450 at his funeral. The support has been amazing, but not unexpected, for we knew that Joe had touched and changed and saved many lives as we were told at his wake.

After Joe died, I found out that he had not changed his beneficiary from his father to myself. Imagine my shock when the Teacher's Retirement Board told me that I would not receive his full pension because his father was the beneficiary. But, his father died 6 years ago, how could this be possible? Then I was told the one and only solution was to change the legislation. What does that mean? What is the law and what is my next step. For me, as an average citizen this seemed insurmountable. I had no clue how to proceed. If it wasn't for Joe's and my family I would not be here today.

Overwhelming doesn't even touch upon the feeling that I had in pursuing this change in legislation. This was obviously and oversight on Joe's part, he would have wanted our family to be taken care of. This mess was clearly not his intention, that we would be expected to live on less than one third of his full pension that he paid into for twenty-two years. Without his full pension, I will lose my home and my children's college education will be in jeopardy.

Anything you could possibly do to expedite this legislation to relieve the anxiety and stress for our family, would be greatly appreciated. It is my understanding from the Governor's aide, that once this legislation reaches the Governor's desk he will sign it. In deference to your time I have not asked all of these people to testify because they are all going to say the same thing, Joe was a great person and this situation is totally unbelievable. It is our hope that this mistake be remedied as soon as possible. I have a petition and over 120 letters, addressed to the co-chairs, that I submit to you for your consideration in this matter.

During many classes Joe would have his students repeat "I am kind, I am smart, I am important" made famous by the movie "The Help". That statement summarizes what kind of person Joe was as a teacher, citizen, friend, brother, father, and husband.

Please let us live our lives as Joe would have wanted.

I want to share with you offerings from Joe's students, made in memory of him.

Thank you for your time.

Leanne Connolly

Leanne Connolly

866-871-1229