

To: The Appropriations Committee of the General Assembly
The Honorable Senator Toni Harp and Representative Tony Walker, Co-Chairs
March 19th, 2012

My name is Carol Vinick. I'm writing to ask for your support for raised bill number H.B.5443, An Act Concerning Benefits for Surviving Spouses Under the Teachers' Retirement System.

I would like to tell you a little bit about my brother-in-law, Joe Connolly. Joe was always a family man. He was the sixth of seven children in a large, loving family. He was totally devoted to his family of origin, as he was to his wife and children.

Joe was a brilliant, talented man. He was a superb 6th grade teacher at Timothy Edwards Middle School in South Windsor for 22 years. But Joe didn't just teach English. He taught his kids that they had self worth, and to be kind to each other. Joe was also a talented musical theatre director. He directed the annual musical at Timothy Edwards School, as well as summer youth theatre for the Town of East Hartford, and theatre productions at his church. Joe was all about kids and letting them shine. In Joe's productions every child that wanted to participate was given the opportunity. He found a way for every student who wanted a speaking or singing part to have one, even if it was during an intermission show on the main stage, or a side show out in the lobby. Students were all included, including students with special needs.

Joe loved his kids and loved bringing out the best in them. Of course, Joe's greatest love was for his family, his wife Leanne, and their two children, Erin and Patrick. Joe married Leanne one year after he started teaching, and neglected to change the beneficiary on his pension from his Dad to his wife. Grandpa died six years ago. Joe died last November, at the age of 55. In the midst of her grief his wife, Leanne, found out that since Joe never changed the beneficiary to her, and since Grandpa died and can't make known his wishes, that she is entitled to a fraction of his benefit. Leanne cannot afford to make the payment on her home and pay for college tuition for her two children without Joe's full pension, that we all know Joe would want her to have.

Now I'm sure Joe isn't the first and won't be the last to make this mistake. After I learned of Joe's error and his family's situation, I checked with my pension fund to make sure everything was in order, and found that my husband was not named as a beneficiary!

Please support HB5443, An Act Concerning Benefits for Surviving Spouses Under the Teachers' Retirement System, so that Joe's family, and families like his, will receive the pension benefits their loved ones had intended for them.

Thank you for your consideration,

Carol J. Vinick

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