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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
ROBYN KAPLAN-CHO,
CONNECTICUT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (CEA)**

**REGARDING RAISED BILL NO. 5353
"AAC INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND OTHER
ISSUES RELATING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION"**

BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MARCH 5, 2012

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Robyn Kaplan-Cho and I am employed by the Connecticut Education Association where my responsibilities include advising and educating teachers about special education laws and regulations.

R.B. 5353 stems in part from the recommendations of the legislatively created IEP Task Force that met last year. It bears noting that of the 21 appointed members of the Task Force, there was not one regular or special education teacher. The only representative of the non-administrative certified staff was a school psychologist. The majority of the members were administrators, parents, and parent advocates. This was disheartening given the vital role that both regular and special educators play in the special education process.

Throughout the meetings, there was much discussion among the Task Force members of the increasingly key role that regular educators, in particular, play in the lives of special education students, given that more special education students than ever are being included in regular education placements. Even after the Task Force members recognized the need to seek a broader perspective from school staff and

approximately ten “experts” were invited to address the Task Force, not one actively employed special or regular education teacher was included.

Consequently, CEA welcomes the opportunity to provide the perspective of all certified school staff on this bill.

Section 1 of this proposal amends 10-76d of the statutes to require districts to offer parents a pre-PPT meeting with a member of the PPT, specifically to discuss the process and any parental concerns before the initial PPT meeting. In practice, parental requests for pre-meetings with select staff members are accommodated as a courtesy when it is possible to do so. However, these new requirements could become very time consuming and impractical for school district staff that is already stretched thin and facing ever-increasing obligations and mandates competing for time. Moreover, we are concerned that if a pre-PPT meeting is required when requested by a parent, it could result in extending the timeline for implementing the IEP, which may not ultimately be in the best interest of the student.

Section 1 also mandates that parents receive evaluation results at least 3 days prior to the PPT meeting when so requested. There is no question that it is more beneficial for the parents to have an opportunity to read the evaluation information prior to attending the PPT meeting. In fact, many districts already supply this information to parents in advance of the PPT as a matter of practice. However, given diminishing resources and the number of people and procedures involved in the evaluation process, it is not always possible to do this. Establishing a deadline 3 days prior to the initial PPT – especially if the pre-meeting proposed in this bill is also enacted – could create unnecessary obstacles resulting in missed deadlines and/or diminishing quality of the evaluation itself.

Therefore, CEA supports the goal of providing parents with evaluation results prior to the initial PPT meeting provided that sufficient staffing levels and resources are available to complete this task within the proposed mandated time frame.

Section 2 of Bill 1038 would require all teacher candidates, no matter what their area of study, to have instruction in the development and implementation of student individualized education programs (IEPs). This mandate is unnecessary. Current law already requires teacher candidates to take a course in special education, and new pre-service teacher competencies require all teacher candidates must demonstrate their ability to plan, implement, and assess instruction for students with a wide range of abilities and learning needs.

This same bill would require all special educators to earn 10 hours of continuing education unit credit (CEU) in implementing IEPs, and communicating IEPs to parents, as part of the 90-hour requirement to renew their professional educator certificates. Although the future of CEUs is uncertain at this point given the numerous proposals before the legislature this year, it bears noting that this mandate is unnecessary. Special education preparation programs include these topics in their course of study, and this is reinforced through the pre-service teacher competencies as they apply to special education. The day-to-day tasks of a special educator

also require them to implement IEPs and communicate with parents, which continuously refines their skills. Mandating CEUs in this area would take time from other areas of study special educators would pursue through continuing education, which would be a disservice to students in the long run.

In light of the significant role discussed above that all staff, both regular and special education, play in the education of students with disabilities, CEA supports the provision in Section 3 that specifies that in-service programs include training in the implementation of IEPs for all teachers, administrators and pupil personnel staff. However, it is important for this professional learning to be planned and implemented collaboratively with teachers, and based on their identified needs, using appropriate learning formats.

Thank you for your time and consideration.