

*Remarks of Anne Lutz Fernandez-Carol
Teacher, English
Westport*

For the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24 (6)
(Tenure and Teacher Evaluation)

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My name is Anne Lutz Fernandez-Carol, an English teacher at Staples High School in Westport. I would like to comment on Senate Bill 24 regarding tenure and teacher evaluation.

In 1999, I left a lucrative career in investment banking to become a public school teacher. What made the change seem worth the financial sacrifice was a belief that my work would be socially valuable and that my job would be relatively secure. Today, I still earn less than 10% of what I was making when I left Wall Street, and though the work is far more demanding than I imagined, I have few regrets.

I do, however, have grave concerns that if Senate Bill 24 is passed as currently written, highly qualified career changers will find the trade-offs untenable and our best and brightest graduates will be even less likely than they now are to enter the profession. Tying state certification to district evaluations and tying pay to certification are two elements of the bill that will make the profession anathema to all but the most saintly or least marketable.

Tying state certification to district evaluations would be disastrous. We all know people who thrived after moving from one employer to another or after working under a new boss. I began my career in an urban district but moved to a suburb where I am yet more effective. (Just one reason: the students more readily identify with me.) Under Bill 24, a teacher who struggles in one district but could succeed in another would find his or her prospects ruined.

Tying pay to certification/tenure would also be a terrible mistake. A talented teacher who has a few tough years not performing at his or her best (easily imaginable if one is dealing with family or personal illness, for example) before rebounding to his or her full potential could see a pay cut. Even if the risk of a drop is small, the pressure this would put on teachers and the anxiety it would produce in their families would be destructive. I also wonder how teachers would secure mortgages once banks realize that teacher income could be subject to wild swings. This risk would be unique to the profession—under true merit pay, employees are only subject to salary cuts if demoted or under drastic restructurings.

Had these two provisions of the bill been in effect when I changed careers, I would have chosen to teach in another state—or I would have chosen not to teach at all.

When I entered the profession, I did not understand why teachers needed tenure. Having spent a decade in a high achieving district where parents hold great sway, I now understand all

too well. One or a few powerful parents can wreak havoc on a teacher's reputation and put his or her job at risk. Administrators wish to avoid calls from unhappy parents, and parents can be made unhappy by a grade they feel is undeserved, by a well-documented accusation of cheating, or by a disciplinary action perceived as detrimental to a child's college aspirations. This has already resulted in grade inflation, increased cheating, and watered down curricula in some districts. Unless teachers have input into how they are evaluated, this trend will be exacerbated.

If parents, students, and administrators have excessive input into evaluation, we risk closing the achievement gap not by raising standards in low achieving districts but by lowering them in high achieving districts. Add standardized test scores into the evaluative mix, and you will have teachers teaching to the test and students earning As for test preparation.

I, like my fellow teachers, wish to see the achievement gap closed. However, we have seen well-intentioned efforts backfire badly in the past. Please do not rush this legislation. Please take serious and specific input from teachers of every subject, at every grade level, and in every type of district. Teachers are not resisting change. We want change that is smart and good; we want change that is supported by research not politics, and we want change that protects the profession from being further diminished.

Thank you for your consideration.