

*Remarks of Yvette Budrow
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**Before the Education Committee
On S.B No. 24 – AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Section 29, 30 - *Teacher Tenure and Teacher Evaluation***

February 21, 2012

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

My name is Yvette Budrow, and I'm a Career and Technical teacher in Hamden, CT. I have been in education for 18 years and have a BS in Accounting and CHOOSE to be an educator. I could become an accountant and have a more lucrative career, but I want to help shape the future of our country. I came from a poor, broken family with many issues, and public education was the equalizer that allowed me to become the highly educated person I am today. Students need teachers who understand where they come from and believe they can go anywhere. I am that teacher and will never stop being amazed at what my students can do, especially in the face of constant personal adversity.

I am very concerned about Senate Bill 24, Section 29. Teacher tenure is not a guarantee of a "forever job." In fact, teachers can be forced out of the profession in a variety of ways that do not involve a costly hearing. I have watched many districts reduce staff by all non-tenured teachers at the end of their 4th year. They are competent young teachers but the district wants to decrease their payroll. When a school loses a large portion of its teachers at one time, the environment becomes very fragile and chaotic. If you are not aware of this result, please look at the performance of any inner-city school with a high turnover rate. If tenure becomes obsolete, our students will suffer. A school's culture depends on having a core of veteran people as the backbone; slowly absorbing new teachers over time and helping them acclimate to their new surroundings. Without this process, testing and learning will suffer. Educators will be at the mercy of their evaluators and principals and will need to make a choice between what is good for their students and what they must do to keep their jobs. If this happens, I will leave my profession.

In addition, Section 30 of Senate Bill 24, student testing and learning, will be used to evaluate a teacher's performance. I teach a diverse group of students. Some are extremely bright while others choose not to come to school or engage in lessons because they are bored, possess a severe disability, are tired, or just not interested. I bring my "A game" every single day to my classroom. Adolescents deal with many challenges and obstacles in their young lives. I never give up on any student but by the time I get them in high school, with no authority at home, I can't make a student do anything they do not wish to. By all means, hold me accountable for the learning that takes place in my classroom for students that have good attendance, participation, and vision for their future. I teach every student, regardless of ability or past learning experiences.

Many parents admit that they do not know what to do with their teenage son or daughter. Society lacks role models, parents who create and maintain boundaries, productive after school clubs in the community, respect for our young people, and has genuine mistrust of our young minority adolescents. Schools suffer the same society ills that surround them. We do not function in a vacuum and problems stay with our students when they walk through our public school doors. Our students are unique and vary in their ability to learn and limitations they may have due to disabilities.

If a test is the only measure of a teacher's effectiveness, then a child is simply a number. Soft skills, integrity, citizenship, community awareness, and contributions will have no value. Schools are not the panacea for all ills. We do need to change to reach the highest number of students graduating equipped with skills to work and continue their education. This proposal is simply an example of finding an easy target to place blame and avoid the hard work: How do we reform our schools to engage students and help all of them succeed?

The future of this country depends upon cooperation by the people who can make changes and the teachers who know how to implement and evaluate strategies. It is shameful that my profession earns zero public respect. The community needs to shadow teachers and see exactly what goes on in American classrooms. It is a very difficult job with rewards that will never be measured in a paycheck. Please do not shame and scare young people away from this commendable profession. Change is needed, but the proposed changes will be extremely damaging to all teachers and public schools. Do not support the bill as stated but speak out – and we may begin to build a better education system for all American students.