

***Remarks of Andrew Niscaji
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**Before the Education Committee
On S.B. No. 24, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Section 29, *Teacher Tenure***

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Andrew Niscaji, and I'm a middle school mathematics teacher in Wilton. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 29, regarding teacher tenure.

The present tenure system under Connecticut's Fair Dismissal Act works well. There seems to be the perception among people who don't teach that it is impossible for a district to terminate an ineffective teacher. That simply is not the case. As you are hopefully aware, the Fair Dismissal Act provides several reasons for the dismissal of a tenured teacher, and teachers are aware of this. I am in my eleventh year as President of the Wilton Education Association, and over those eleven years I have been involved with the school district counseling several tenured teachers out of the district. NONE of these cases required a termination hearing. Teachers do not want the stress, embarrassment, and uncertainty of the hearings, so they choose to leave willingly through resignation or retirement. The present system of teacher tenure works in Wilton. Through resignation or retirement, administration has been able to achieve the removal of every single tenured teacher with whose performance it was dissatisfied over the past eleven years that I have been president.

In Wilton we have not had many tenured teachers with whose performance the administration is dissatisfied because our building administrators are aggressive about evaluating teachers during the four year probationary period before tenure status is attained. Most years, administrative evaluations of non-tenured teachers result in from one to three non-tenured teachers being told that their contracts will not be renewed the following year. In my eleven years as President here, not a single teacher who was told that his contract would not be renewed chose to fight it. Instead, they just resign.

The present system of tenure works in Connecticut, and I submit that building administrators play a crucial role in determining its success. Administrators have four years to evaluate and appraise the effectiveness of new teachers. If ineffective tenured teachers are a problem in districts, then administration in those districts is not availing itself of the ability to diligently evaluate teachers in their first four years and dismiss ineffective ones. If administration wants to dismiss an occasional ineffective tenured teacher that may have slipped through cracks, then that teacher can be counseled out of the district without protracted and costly hearings. The vast majority of teachers do not want to work in a district in which their work is not appreciated.

I strongly urge you to reject all of Governor Malloy's proposed changes to teacher tenure. The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) has recommended shortening the timeline to dismiss a tenured teacher from 120 to 85 days, along with reducing the required number of arbitrators from three to one in order to reduce cost. These are the only changes to the Fair Dismissal Act that should be considered.