

Tenure and Professional Evaluations – Comments for Public Hearing on February 21, 2012

My name is Erin Sullivan, and I am an educator. I am in my twelfth year as a high school English teacher. I have served students both in Bridgeport and in Torrington. I have taught grades 9 – 12 at all levels, the lowest and the highest. I passed the BEST portfolio in my second year. I have advised student council, coached the debate team, run after-school tutoring programs, taught professional development, coached the swim team, advised the student newspaper, been a mentor to fellow teachers and a cooperating teacher for student teachers, dedicated my free time and my money to various endeavors on behalf of my students. I have always received exemplary evaluations. I have been active in earning continuing education to benefit my students, including getting a master's degree in English from CCSU, where I was honored for excellence by the graduate studies program.

I am a prime candidate to benefit from the governor's creative overhaul of the evaluation and tenure criteria for public school teachers. As an exemplary teacher, my job security should not in the least be affected by this bill.

And yet, I am vehemently opposed to it. Senate Bill 24 is counter-productive to improving education in this state. The bill grossly misrepresents both the current practices involving tenure and – even more – the problem with achievement today. The bill is political ploy to gain favor by reacting to public angst and misconceptions regarding the teaching profession. It does not, in a way, reflect the reality of the obstacles that are currently impacting achievement.

The truth is simple – tenure is an effective way to ensure effective teaching. In order to receive tenure, teachers must be evaluated by their administrators numerous times a year over the course of their first four years in a district. I taught for four years in Bridgeport and, for personal reasons, transferred to Torrington. Although I was recommended for tenure in Bridgeport because of an exemplary record, my choice to move eliminated the opportunity. I then taught for four years in Torrington. After these four years, my principal saw it fit to recommend me for tenure. One of colleagues, at the same time, was *not* recommended for tenure. The administration found this person was not worthy of tenure. If teachers who should not receive tenure are granted it, that is problem with administration – not teachers.

As a tenured teacher, I am still evaluated by my administration. I still must do my job in order to maintain my job. However, I have the security of knowing that my job can't be cut just because the district needs to save money. It is cheaper to employ a first year teacher than a 12th year teacher Keeping in mind that, because of budget issues, my salary has

been frozen and I am only earning the salary of an 8th year teacher. Districts under pressure to save cost increasingly cut teachers rather than other programs. First year teachers are cheaper – and also less experienced. And experience counts. If I cannot have the security of knowing my job will not be left up to the whim of the taxpayers, then I cannot continue in this profession.

Looking at the big picture, however, we must see that legislative overreaching in education is doomed for failure. No Child Left Behind has been found to be ineffective as a national law. You cannot tie test performance to “achievement.” Schools cannot be the parents to these students. As long as property taxes are tied to school funding, the income and achievement gap will continue. Overhaul school funding, or recognize that the achievement gap has more to do with social conditions than conditions inside the classroom. Recognize that public schools in the United States are the “default” school, and that we test everyone – not just the best and the brightest. When examining the “state of education today,” take those factors into account and properly educate the public about them. But to pass a law that attempts to micro-manage a complex profession is to inhibit the ability of quality teachers to do their jobs. Trust us. Give us the respect that we deserve. Free us from the fear that personality conflicts or budget concerns are going to impact our job security. Encourage teachers to get advanced degrees and to participate in auxiliary training or tutoring programs where they can have more of an impact on student’s lives. Get the right information about what is limiting student achievement today and get teachers involved in the conversation. Finally, understand that these new statutes regarding certification, tenure and pay are going to force more quality teachers out of this profession, increase turn-over rate, and harm student learning more than help it.

Thank you.