

To: The Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee
From: James D. McNair III 19 Esther Lane, Colchester, CT
Date: February 17, 2012
Re: Supporting Education Bill S.B. 24

Chairs Stillman and Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on this important bill. Education Bill S.B. 24 is a great step in the right direction.

Public education has been extremely helpful to me. It allowed me to graduate from Princeton University from a modest suburban background. I was lucky enough to always be assigned to the best teachers in every school district I attended. Yet, I realized that all children are not lucky enough to get the best and the brightest teachers in a school district.

I have committed my life to public education. My father was an educator. My father-in-law was a career teacher in Meriden. I was on the Colchester Board of Education 2002-2006 and I was the Education Chair of the Middletown NAACP. I also was a substitute teacher in the Glastonbury and Colchester school districts for several years.

Over the years, I constantly heard frustration with the status quo. Fellow board members felt handcuffed not being able to effectively remove poor teachers. Parents regretted not having their children assigned to the better teachers. Young teachers worried they would be cut first while less qualified teachers were safe solely because of seniority.

This bill will effectively change the great short comings of the status quo. Many citizens that approve the billions of dollars spent to educate our children understand that change is necessary. This bill will allow teachers to be fairly evaluated. Those that earn it will be rewarded. Those that do not will have a chance to change before dismissal.

Paying millions for ineffective teachers protected by seniority and a lengthy dismissal process does not make sense for anyone involved, especially the students. Their futures depend on great teachers and great schools and when we don't hold adults accountable for their success, we're sending them the message that we don't care. How many more jobs do we need to see leave the state, or high school dropouts turn into prison inmates before we realize we have a problem?

In closing, the only suggestion I have to improve this bill is including language to get rid of the last-in first-out teacher layoffs. As a Board of Education member it was painful to see bright, energetic and qualified new teachers first on the chopping block while less qualified teachers were not. Despite this limitation, I support Senate Bill 24 and I encourage this Committee to pass it.