

*Remarks of
Lori A. Woodfield
7th grade language arts teacher
Cheshire*

Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section (28,29,30,31,33)
(Teacher evaluation and Tenure)

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

My name is Lori A. Woodfield, and I'm a teacher in Cheshire. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section's 28, 29, 30, 31, and 33.

I would like to start by saying that I have never done this before, which speaks to the gravity of the situation. I am a 7th grade language arts teacher in Cheshire. I have been teaching for seven years, six of which have been at Dodd Middle School. This is a second career for me, and one that my family and I sacrificed at great lengths for me to achieve. I left a career where all that was required to achieve was a 6th grade reading level and one where people may not necessarily have shown the utmost respect. When I finally decided to return to school in my 40's, I had a son in college, a daughter in high school, another son in middle school, and a husband who traveled for IBM. I decided to go back for my degree, so I could make a difference in children's lives, and show not only my own children but also other children the value of education.

Graduating and getting a job seemed like a dream, but lurking behind in the wings were the next two years geared towards BEST. I'm sure you all remember that great program. After finally recovering from the agony and craziness of BEST, I thought I could finally focus on "just teaching," or so I thought. Year three came with more changes and more new initiatives. Maybe year four would be the year that I could, "Take it easy." Oh! No, not that year. That was the year for extensive and intensive training for Co-teaching with countless hours of planning. I know it will be next year then. No, again. This was the year for SRBI and the interventions that needed to take place to help students in need. More planning, more revamping, more reorganizing. Finally, I am at year seven. Isn't this the year it's supposed to get easier like "everyone" always says? The point is, it doesn't. Teachers do what they need to do every day, all day, all year. However, it's the last six and half years with all of the initiatives and training and planning and revamping that have made me a better, more skilled professional. Some things do get better with time and maybe age. Teaching is one of those.

It frightens me to think of some of the repercussions that will happen if this bill passes. One of them for sure would be the balancing of town budgets at the expense of the students

and the teachers. The other will be a career with a very short life span. Students deserve experienced teachers. I know that I am a much more effective teacher year seven than I was at years one and two. The more you do something, the better you get at it. There's always a different way to approach a concept or use different materials to change and adapt a lesson. Not to mention how things need to change year to year based on the population of students you have in your class. If teacher evaluation and salaries change with this bill, towns will have no other choice than to replace experienced teachers to keep taxes low. In turn, students will pay with a constant turn over of young, new inexperienced teachers. Teachers who may never reach their full potential. And, the cycle will continue.

In addition, this bill will allow for such a situation by replacing the current system of evaluation, one that has high standards, with a system of subjective evaluations by principals, some who have never stepped foot in a classroom as a teacher. Some of you might think that if someone is a supervisor/evaluator that he or she has been trained to do that job, but I would beg to differ. Who will observe the administrators to see that they are being effective and fair? Someone who has never been an administrator? Would you want someone to oversee and evaluate a pilot if that person never stepped foot in the cockpit of a plane? I wouldn't! No one knows what it is like to work in a particular field, unless you have worked in that field! Or, more importantly, taught in the classroom. This might seem like a fine situation if you happen to get along with your current evaluator, but that could all change if the administration changes. If we are to keep well qualified teachers in the classroom, we need to use more indicators than one person's opinion. CEA's recommendation for student achievement using standardized scores, parent and student input should all be considered to make evaluations fair and equitable.

It's ridiculous to think with this bill that a professional's career and salary could be based on the subjective evaluation of one person. However, if this passes, that is exactly what will happen. Teachers will no longer need to further their education. A Master's Degree would no longer be necessary, which is sad. I know I never felt as proud as I did the day I walked across the stage at Harbor Yard Arena when I received my Master's Degree. Now, why would anyone spend the money to do such a thing? A teacher's evaluation rating would determine his or her salary, not the level of education that he or she has attained. Furthermore, with the new rating scale and levels of certification, CEU's would be eliminated. Further proof that the notion of continuing education is not necessary. What other profession lowers their standards in an attempt to attract and keep the best and the brightest? None that I know of!

To add insult to injury with the lowering of teacher's educational requirements is the elimination of Superintendents' certification. This bill would allow for the commissioner of education to appoint anyone that he or she deems as "highly qualified." What criteria would that exactly be? What's more, this bill eliminates the requirement for districts to have Professional development committees with teachers on them. I would think, and I would hope that most people would want both of these positions to be filled by individuals who are at least "familiar" with the educational system. Who else knows more of what students and teachers need than teachers?

Furthermore, tenure, as many people think, is not a safety net for old, tired teachers, but one where higher paid; experienced teachers are not in jeopardy of losing their jobs due to fluctuating economies and balancing budgets. With the new proposed system, teachers will need to earn three proficient or exemplary ratings by a single evaluator in a pre-determined time period in order to keep his or her job. This system would eliminate due process and the ability for that teacher to retain his or her position as well as the possibility for further employment. Again, all of this based on one "evaluator's" opinion. CEA's option would provide for a process where opinion and personality could be counteracted with one where a neutral party would determine what is in the best interest for the students and the district.

All of these proposed changes in terms of evaluations, education, salary, and tenure are an attempt by the government to close the achievement gap. All of which are at the expense of the teachers and students. I ask you, what bill proposes closing the achievement gap by way of the first and most precious of all teachers? The parents. Those of us that are in the "trenches" so to speak know that unless the value of education and the drive to achieve is reinforced at home, students are at an enormous disadvantage for educational success. Teachers do impart knowledge and influence students on a daily basis, but not more than the hours that are spent with their other "teachers." Their parents. My own children watched while my husband took 12 years of his life and theirs to finish his degree and another four while I finished mine. In our home, it wasn't, "What are you doing after high school?" It was, "Where are you going?" Their goals and futures, although influenced by great teachers, started at home where my husband and I created their level of expectation. It was through our expectations in conjunction with their teachers that our children were able to go on to become an Air Force Fighter Pilot, a Math Teacher and a PGA Golf Professional.

I leave you with his thought. If you want students, parents, and citizens to value education, then you as representatives and elected officials must first value education. We lost thousands of well qualified and dedicated individuals in the past to the minimizing of the job by way of poverty stricken salaries. In a society and culture where ageing is viewed as negative, show students that experience, dedication, and drive is something to be respected. Please, do not let the future generation view this profession as one where people are replaceable. Prove to the citizens of this state that the closing of the achievement gap, the betterment of students and the respect of a profession is in their best interest of all by voting "NO" to Senate Bill 24!