



Testimony of Lori Pelletier
Secretary-Treasurer
Connecticut AFL-CIO
Education Committee
Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleishman, and members of the Education committee. My name is Lori Pelletier and I serve as the Secretary -Treasurer of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, and I am here to testify on behalf of our 900 affiliated local unions who represent over 200,000 union members from all 169 cities and towns.

The Connecticut AFL-CIO has an interest in SB 24 not only from the perspective of those in the classroom, but from those impacted by the results in the classroom. We have been first hand witnesses to the deterioration of the middle class because of the lack of concern by elected leaders on keeping family supporting jobs here in our state and our nation.

Too much focus on education reform has been directed at our teaching profession. The labor movement was an integral part of making public education a priority for this country and will continue to push for our schools to be the very best they can be. But let me be clear collective bargaining is not the reason our public education system is in distress. The reality is collective bargaining provides an opportunity for all the parties to work TOGETHER to make the system better.

Let's look at real life examples of how collective bargaining made education better.

- Nationally recognized school reforms in New Haven which included model teacher evaluation and development.
- Bargained class sizes addressing the needs of the students and teacher development, including length of day and school year.
- Bargained career ladders for skilled teachers to mentor new and struggling teachers.
- School wide bonuses for overall improved student learning in Hartford

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If we are looking to lay blame then we should look at the income disparity of our state and the diminished earning power of our families. Poverty and lack of secure jobs and family life is what is the real driver behind our shortfalls in education. Not the pension a teacher may earn or an administrator's right to collectively bargain.

This legislature has an awesome responsibility to produce the best education reform package and to do it before midnight on May 9th, less than 11 weeks from now. So we are faced with a decision do we get into the real nuts and bolts of education reform and make a difference for our children? Or do we cater to those who whip up a frenzy and use sound bites of tenure, pensions and collective bargaining as scape goats? The affiliates of the Connecticut AFLCIO and their families hope you all choose to do right by our children and not fall victim to an educator witch hunt.

AFT-CT and CEA are your partners in this effort as well as the Administrators, Paraprofessionals, Custodians, and the entire labor movement. So let's work together to accomplish great things and not get bogged down on issues that make great press but have terrible results.

Thank you for holding this public hearing and we look forward to partnering with you on this issue.

Lori J. Pelletier
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Connecticut AFL-CIO

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