

Remarks of Lora Rossomando  
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Presented before the Education Committee  
On Senate Bill 24, Section 26, 28, 29 & 30

**Teacher certifications based on evaluations and the impact on teacher pay scales.**

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

My name is Lora Rossomando, and I'm a Stamford teacher and currently president of our teacher association. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, specifically sections 26, 28, 29 & 30 which refer to teacher certification categories, evaluation ratings to achieve those certifications, and the use of both to determine pay raises/decreases and termination.

The Governor's bill mandates a complicated, yet to be specified, system that replaces objective state standards for educator certification with local evaluations that are subjective, conducted by a single administrator and impact teachers' certification, pay, and tenure. In addition, the plan proposes setting three levels of certification (initial, professional, and an optional master educator) that diminish the value of advanced degrees educators attain to enhance their skills. SB# 24 also proposes to eliminate essential rights held by tenured and non-tenured teachers.

I come before you because I had a few stories to share.

Recently, I met with a non-tenured teacher who was informed she was potentially being non-renewed this year. This is her second year teaching and came as quite a surprise. She is actively involved in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) a program that supports struggling students who would be the first in their families to go to college and runs an after school science program CPEP (Connecticut Pre-engineering Program) and is well respected by students and parents alike. In October, she was nominated by her colleagues and parents to represent the teacher perspective on the newly formed Governance Council. She is vocal and a strong supporter of student needs. It was well known that her principal was extremely concerned about the establishment of a mandated governance council for the school and the impact it could have on the role of the administrator. It was also well known that principal did not want this teacher on the council and had inquired if a non-tenured teacher could even be chosen. Just three weeks after being nominated onto the governance council, the teacher's assistant principal conducted a formal observation and ripped her instruction apart. One week later she was informed of non-renewal. She is slated to be let go at the end of the school year.

But, as it so happens, last year the teacher was evaluated by the other assistant principal at the school (who is retired now), on the *exact same* lesson. That evaluation spoke glowingly about her use of differentiation, her knowledge, rigor and understanding of pedagogy. Two additional evaluations from last year continued in the same vein. What happened? Did the teacher suddenly lose her skill of teaching? I doubt it. This teacher has no due process rights, she's not tenured, and has no recourse. She will lose her job. The only upswing is that she can be rehired in another district.

This is the type of scenario every teacher (tenured or not) may face if Senate Bill 24 comes to fruition. Under this bill, a teacher rated "below standard" could be fired immediately. Additionally, since this bill ties the evaluation to certification, a teacher would not be able to teach in another district and their career

would be over. An appeal hearing could only look at whether the rating leading to termination was in accordance with the evaluation process. If rated “developing” instead, the teacher’s pay step would be reduced changing the certification status, which in turn could cause the loss of tenure. All these consequences are based on one administrator’s fears. Senate Bill 24 would force teachers to remain silent about issues that affect students, issues affecting the teachers’ ability to teach, and will create a hostile and intimidating work environment.

Consider this: suppose the teacher had been reduced in pay, as this bill would allow. How would she pay her mortgage? For that matter, how would teachers even get mortgages in the first place? What bank would grant a mortgage to person in a pay system that fluctuates at will?

Senate Bill 24 inordinately impacts females. Teaching is a predominately female profession and this bill would penalize teachers who become pregnant, take a 12 week leave to deliver their child and then return. They would still be evaluated based on their student test scores even though a substitute had been in place during their absence. Furthermore, their pay could be reduced because of this evaluation.

A second story revolves around the change in administrators’ evaluation which went into effect this year. An administrator’s evaluation is now based on student test scores. Two current non-renewal teachers clearly have classes which are populated with the most behaviorally difficult and needy students for that grade, students that are more likely to be below proficient on the CMTs. As a new teacher, this is the type of class one learns to teach over time, by sharing experiences with colleagues and through the guidance of mentors. An effective administrator would never have created a class with this student make-up to begin with, as this selective grouping is not best practice, nor should they have placed new teachers, instead of proven veteran teachers, in the most needy class. Yet the administrators these two new teachers have *did* create the class and restricted all observations to that class *only*. The teachers are being non renewed based on the evaluation from that class alone. It is our opinion that the administrator created this situation to justify the low test scores of the students in those classes on the ineffectiveness of the teacher. Furthermore, the administrator will be determined effective because they addressed the problem when they non-renewed the teachers.

Currently, our teacher certification process encourages educators to be continual learners. Beginning non-tenured teachers with an initial educator certificate receive a mentor and must complete the newly enacted TEAM (Teacher Education and Mentoring) process to move to a provisional certificate. Tenured teachers with a provisional certificate must earn a master’s degree in order to move to a professional certificate. Professional certificate teachers must obtain 90 CEU’s (Continuing Education Units) which provide teachers with knowledge of best practices in the subjects they teach, and specifically in reading and technology, in order to maintain their certificate. Senate Bill 24 removes the CEU requirements, no longer mandates a master’s degree and replaces both with a vague set of professional development guidelines. It seems hypocritical that a state which claims it is making sweeping changes to education in order to increase the number of students who are college ready would then remove advanced college degrees as a valid indicator of professional certifications and commensurate pay.

I was asked today by a teacher who had read SB 24 if he should begin classes for his sixth year degree. I had no answer. The cost of obtaining a sixth year degree is clearly cost prohibitive when it holds no value to the state and brings no financial gain. Senate Bill 24 will inadvertently impact our state colleges and universities when participation in advanced degrees suddenly declines.

Clearly, in just the few days I have had to digest this sweeping bill, I have found real inconsistencies and downright dangerous implications to the stability of the educational system. I see no correlation between the changes and the intended purpose of creating a more educated student population and workforce. Best practices in evaluation systems already in place across the country, such as PAR (Peer Assistance and

Review) which creates an evaluation system based on teaching standards developed collaboratively by teachers and administrators, provides coaching to improve teaching practices, and timely and effectively removes or counsels out teachers who are not right for the profession, have not been vetted.

I believe the education committee should stand strong and, in a bipartisan move, reject Senate Bill 24. Rejection would send a strong statement to those who present this bill that you will not accept a Bill with so many deficiencies in design and purpose, and which shifts sweeping powers to single entities.

Thank you.