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Subject: SB 24
message: Dear Senator Bye

I am very concerned about SB 24 and many other issues related to education in CT.

I attempted to testify at the public hearing but my remarks were not posted in time by CEA.

I am troubled by our poor representation at the hearing and by many other issues.

I look forward to meeting you (again) at Sedgwick Middle School where I am an 8th grade science teacher.

I am attaching my testimony here:

Remarks of Ted Goerner
Science Teacher at Sedgwick Middle School in West Hartford

Regarding Teacher Evaluation and Pay

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

My name is Ted Goerner, and I am a science teacher in West Hartford. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 30 which deals with Teacher Evaluation and Salary.

My concern is the heavy emphasis on student test scores in Teacher Evaluation. The linkage of student test scores to teacher pay is problematic on many levels. There are problems related to fairness and to the inevitable impact upon the quality of education in many classrooms.

Science, Math, and English teachers in my district are already required to follow a very strict curriculum that mirrors the concepts that will be covered on the CMT and CAPT. Good teachers in high performing districts such as mine are able to branch out to a certain extent and teach important topics that are not on the test. For example, the concept of light waves, sound waves, and electromagnetic waves is not covered by the Science

CMT. Most teachers will cover this topic in class regardless of the fact that it is not on the test. However, I fear that if salaries are tied to performance on standardized tests, many teachers will be reluctant to diverge from the specific test content. And if they do diverge and spend time teaching concepts that are not on the test, are they not risking the possibility that their students will not perform quite as well as those that strictly teach to the test and only to the test?

I also can't help but wonder how teachers in other disciplines whose students do not take standardized test will be evaluated. Will teachers of social studies, world language, art, music, P.E. and health be evaluated by student scores in Math, Science and English or will newly created standardized tests be used to assess students in those subjects? I can tell you this...the last thing we need is more time being devoted to standardized testing. Testing has become a major disruption to the learning process in our schools with literally weeks of our year devoted to this purpose.

An even greater concern to me is the hyper-standardization that is brought about by so much formulaic testing. No test is perfect but the constant alignment and re-alignment of our curriculum with tests is leading us towards a future in which every child in the state will be taught exactly the same material in exactly the same way. This is a bureaucratization of education. It has and will continue to drain the spontaneity and intellectual passion from our classrooms. Teachers need to have the freedom to teach in a way that will best prepare students for an ever-changing world. Teachers need the freedom to teach the things that they and their classes of heterogeneously grouped students are most passionate about and to tailor their instruction on a daily basis.

One final consideration is the socioeconomic variable. Our state has the greatest socioeconomic gaps in the nation. Our classrooms mirror that and so do our test scores. This is inevitable. There is tremendous variation between districts, between schools, between classrooms, and even between the yearly student cohorts of the same teacher. To evaluate teachers based on student test scores is like rating dentists based upon the number of cavities that their patients have or rating doctors based on the levels of obesity amongst their patients. There are huge external factors that influence test scores beyond what a teacher can control.

I urge you to reject section 30 of Senate Bill 24 and any other section that ties teacher salaries so heavily to student test scores.