

March 1, 2012

General Assembly
Labor and Public Employees Committee
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 150 – An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees

Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Bill Walkauskas and I am a teacher assistant and bus driver at Whitney High School East in Hamden, which is part of the ACES regional educational service centers system. I am also the president of the Paraprofessional Council in CSEA/SEIU, Local 2001, which has united more than 2,500 paraeducators from 34 different public school districts and RESCs throughout Connecticut.

The role of the “para” has changed greatly since I started my job nearly two decades ago. The reality is that paras play a critical role in the lives of the students we serve, providing academic and social education as well as assisting in traditional classroom instruction.

However, there are many important considerations that are not afforded to paras, but are to teachers, school administrators, and other public employees. These disparities threaten to drive away dedicated, skilled paras who find it increasingly difficult to afford to live and raise their own children and keep the job they love.

One inequity in particular that we believe the legislature must act to resolve pertains to family and medical leave protections. The reality is that in Connecticut, most paras do not legally have access to the rights granted under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

My employer does provide unpaid family and medical leave to those of us working eight-hour workdays. Thankfully, many of us who have dedicated our lives to working with students facing significant challenges have the protection of returning to our jobs after an extended hospital stay or taking time to care for a family member facing illness.

But this right is not fairly distributed to all public school employees. **That is why I urge lawmakers to support S.B. 150 so that paraeducators have access to these protections.** Not only is it fundamentally fair, it won't increase costs for financially strained local school districts and RESCs.

Thank you for your quick attention to this critical matter.

Bill Walkauskas

Teacher Assistant/Bus Driver, Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)
President, Paraprofessional Council, CSEA/SEIU, Local 2001