



AFT Connecticut
AFL AFL-CIO

Testimony of
Melodie Peters, President
AFT Connecticut
Appropriations Committee
March 22, 2013

Healthcare
Higher Education
Public Employees
PSRP
Teachers

**HB 6344 AN ACT CONCERNING THE POSTHUMOUS GRANT OF SERVICE CREDIT IN THE
TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM FOR CERTAIN MEMBERS**

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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melodie Peters and I am President of AFT Connecticut, a union that proudly represents the Newtown Federation of Teachers, including employees at Sandy Hook Elementary School. On their behalf, I submit these remarks on HB 6344, An Act Concerning the Posthumous Grant of Service Credit in the Teachers' Retirement System for Certain Members.

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I would like to take this time to personally thank this Committee for your commitment to this bill. When the horrific tragedy occurred on December 14, 2012, twenty-six lives were taken. Mary Sherlach, the school psychologist and one of the victims, ran towards the violence to save lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School. As her life was painfully taken, she was two months away from reaching 20 years of credit in the Teachers' Retirement System. HB 6344 was introduced and raised on her behalf.

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After her death, the Newtown Board of Education offered to pay the two months of service credit she needed to reach 20 years of service. That way, her family would receive the enhanced benefit that comes with a significant milestone of 20 years' service credit. The statute did not permit this practice. That is why we asked this Committee to raise HB 6344. Fortunately, when the General Assembly passed Emergency Certified HB 6599 on March 6, this issue was resolved not only for Mary Sherlach's family, but for every teacher who died at Sandy Hook. Section 1(l) provides each deceased teacher with a full school year of credit in the Teachers' Retirement System. We therefore no longer need HB 6344.

Mary Sherlach was thinking of retirement and never for a day imagined this horror would enter the halls of Sandy Hook Elementary School. Her heroic actions will never be forgotten and now her family will have to learn to move on without her. We appreciate and thank you for your support and commitment to this issue. Thank you for taking even swifter action with emergency certified HB 6599.

