



Testimony of Marcia Cattanach, Paraprofessional

Member, Paraprofessional Advisory Council

March 4, 2013

Education Committee

HB 6502 An Act Concerning Membership of the Paraprofessional Advisory Council

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Marcia Cattanach. I am presently a member of the Paraprofessional Advisory Council and have been since 2008. I have been a Kindergarten Classroom Instructional Paraprofessional for 23 years, Union building representative and Treasurer. I am here to speak on HB 6502, specifically asking to expand the membership and responsibilities of the Paraprofessional Advisory Council and to increase the number of Paraprofessionals and allow the Council to bring pertinent issues other than professional development to the Commissioner's attention.

Right now we have 5 Paraprofessionals on the Council. By increasing the number of Paraprofessionals on the Council, we would get a much broader picture of what issues are facing our Paraprofessionals in the state. Classroom Instructional Paraprofessionals and Special Education Paraprofessionals have very different, specific professional development needs. Are we meeting those needs, and what districts are taking advantage of the many professional development opportunities being offered?

As drafted, HB 6502 fails to provide more Paraprofessional representation. The language in a similar bill, HB 6183, which I have attached to my testimony, reflects the kind of change we need. I ask you to consider this language before taking action on HB 6502.

In addition to providing professional development advice, the Paraprofessional Advisory Council should be expanded to offer recommendations on staffing and other issues that impact the roles of Paraprofessionals. HB 6502 would allow this. An example of an important issue facing Paraprofessionals is their placement with special needs students. Previously, Paraprofessionals would be placed with special needs students in 1 to 1 assignments, per their student's IEP. The Paraprofessional's responsibilities would center on one student. Today, as district budgets are reduced, Paraprofessionals are no longer assigned to 1 to 1 positions; rather they are now "Adult Support." The Adult Support Paraprofessional can be given any number of students – 4 to 5 special needs students. Within the group of these assignments, there can be students who are extremely violent, and are "runners" who have run out of the building. This creates a dangerous situation for the student as well as the Paraprofessional. There needs to be limitations to the number of special need students assigned to any one Paraprofessional.

Another concern is training. Time and time again Paraprofessionals are transferred to positions with absolutely no training **prior** to being placed with special Nneeds students. It is "on the job training". Paraprofessionals are being placed with students with Autism who have never had any training in Autism. And when the district offers a workshop in Autism, it is severely inadequate, with Paraprofessionals leaving the session more frustrated than when they went in. Instead of sending Paraprofessionals who are repeatedly being scratched and bitten for proper training, they are told to cut the tops and bottoms off of two 2 liter soda bottles, and place them over their arms.

These are just a few of the situations I would want our Commissioner to be aware of, and I would hope he would want to know about them. We need to protect the children in our state when school districts do not. We need the Commissioner of Education to be aware of what is actually happening in our schools. And if allowed, with more Paraprofessionals on the council, the Paraprofessional Advisory Council's report would be the avenue we need to do this.

Thank you,

Marcia Cattanach

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General Assembly
January Session, 2013

Proposed Bill No. 6183
LCO No. 2074

Referred to Committee on EDUCATION

Introduced by:

REP. LEMAR, 96th Dist.

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That section 10-155k of the general statutes be amended to (1) include in the membership of the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council (A) one paraprofessional appointed by (i) the American Federation of Teachers Connecticut, (ii) the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, Council 15, (iii) Municipal Employees Union Independent, (iv) Connecticut State Employees Association, and (v) United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America Local 222, (B) the person most recently awarded Paraprofessional of the Year award, (C) one teacher appointed by the Connecticut Education Association, (D) one teacher appointed by the American Federation of Teachers Connecticut, (E) two representatives from the regional educational service center appointed by the Commissioner of Education, and (F) a school administrator appointed by the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators; and (2) require the council to advise the Commissioner of Education, at least quarterly, of the needs for (A) professional development and training for paraprofessionals, (B) appropriate staffing strategies for paraprofessionals, and (C) other relevant issues relating to paraprofessionals.

Statement of Purpose:

To expand the membership and responsibilities of the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council.