

Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
March 15, 2013
TESTIMONY FOR PUBLIC HEARING:
Senate Bill 1096

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Ranking Members, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Patrice Peterson and I'm the president of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, a union that represents 27,500 state, municipal, and private sector employees and retirees across the state of Connecticut. I'm also a special education teacher for the Department of Developmental Services. CSEA represents Education Administrators who are part of the state's P3A bargaining unit. On behalf of CSEA's members in the P3A bargaining unit, I submit the following testimony on Senate Bill 1096:

Education Administrators in the P3A bargaining unit are an important and necessary component in Connecticut's education infrastructure. P3A members are education consultants who, among many other work functions, supervise training programs for school teachers and paraprofessionals, provide oversight for school construction projects, and administer early intervention programs for the State Department of Education (SDE).

By all appearances, Senate Bill 1096 will legitimize the outsourcing of P3A bargaining unit work to the State Education Resource Center (SERC). By establishing the State Education Resource Center as a "quasi-public agency," Senate Bill 1096 risks turning SERC into a shadow agency not subject to the same level of oversight and accountability as other state agencies. In its present form, we cannot support this legislation.

The bill raises many questions. For instance, will SERC contracts with SDE fall under the review and oversight powers of the State Contracting Standards Board? Does the legislation legitimize SDE's transfer of federal and state grant funds to SERC for work which is done by members of the P3A bargaining unit? Does SB 1096 change the current scope of SERC's programmatic activity?

SERC was originally created to "to assist the [State Board of Education] in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence." It was not created and should not be modified to act as a parallel entity to the types of educational work currently performed by state employees.

Every education professional has a vested interest in providing the best services to the students of Connecticut. We want to help children learn, assist teachers and paraprofessionals in improving their professional skills, and work with communities to build schools in which the most important educational work occurs. However, nobody – not education administrators, not state school teachers, not municipal teachers, not paraprofessionals, and certainly not students and their families – wants to see Connecticut turn SERC into something that operates outside established and respected parameters.

CSEA members are ready and anxious to work with members of the Education Committee to improve this piece of legislation and the effectiveness of SERC. In addition to answering the questions we raise above, we recommend that members of unions performing education work, like CSEA, have seats on the SERC board. We are all committed to ensuring that Connecticut schools are a model for the nation.

Patrice Peterson