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Healthcare
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Testimony of
Stephen McKeever, First Vice President
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Education Committee
February 15, 2013

HB 6357 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION

HB 6358 AN ACT UNLEASHING INNOVATION IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS

HB 6359 AN ACT CONCERNING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

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Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I am the First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of unions representing more than 10,000 of Connecticut's teachers. Prior to my election as First Vice President, I was a high school teacher for 17 years in the Middletown public school system. I am here today to testify on three bills.

- On the whole, AFT Connecticut supports **HB 6357** which realizes the Governor's commitment to public education. By increasing ECS dollars and the manner in which they are distributed, Governor Malloy has stood behind the changes in policy and spirit made with the education reform law passed last session. We stand firmly behind these courageous decisions.

We are concerned however about the elimination of the state's reimbursement to local and regional boards of education for student transportation costs. Though we agree that a regional approach to education could be beneficial, in the absence of a statewide or even regional school calendar, it is difficult to see how this would work. In addition, we are concerned about the amount of time that school children would spend on a bus in transit, especially young elementary students.

- **HB 6358** creates the Teaching Profession Initiative Pilot Program. We understand that the administration's intent is to create a program that elevates the teaching profession. We are not convinced that this is the best approach, but we stand ready to work collaboratively with the administration and this committee in this endeavor. We know that we cannot legislate respect for teachers, but we hope that together we can address issues that will enhance the profession, such as providing teacher-identified professional development, establishing meaningful roles for distinguished educators and increasing teacher



representation on the State Board of Education and other boards that recommend substantive education policy.

- **HB 6359** finally realizes a long-held objective of early childhood advocates – to consolidate all programs and initiatives into a single location with unified governance and vision. While we embrace the intent of this proposal and look forward to seeing its full potential realized, we do not support delaying certification requirements for early childhood educators in state funded early childhood education programs. If publicly funded school readiness programs are to be an effective solution to help close the achievement gap, they must be staffed by fully qualified educators. We would urge you to rethink these implementation delays and focus primarily on the needs of our youngest learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.