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Testimony of

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Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee

February 14, 2013

***HB 5911 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHING OF GIFTED AND
TALENTED CHILDREN***

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Patricia Fusco and I am the President of the West Haven Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1547, and Vice President of AFT Connecticut. On behalf of the more than 10,000 teachers represented by AFT Connecticut, I ask you to oppose HB 5911. Though well intentioned, this legislation will add another certification area for teachers and will limit and make it next to impossible for new teachers to get jobs.

I currently teach Talented and Gifted students in West Haven, but in the 35 years that I have been associated with the district, both as a parent and as an educator, the program has not always been in place. It is one of the programs that are very easy to cut. The law says we must identify talented and gifted students but does not require districts to provide special services to those children. When districts get strapped for money the Talented and Gifted Program is one of the first things on the chopping block since it is not mandated. I know that there are very few districts that still have a gifted program.

It would be more useful for higher education to provide instruction in differentiating instruction, as that would include both ends of the spectrum, the gifted students as well as those with much less ability. All teachers must differentiate every single lesson in order to reach all students. I may be wrong about today's teacher preparation but I know I received absolutely no courses that taught me how to do this, and do this effectively. It is fairly easy to figure out how to challenge kids who are gifted, but to reach all levels is a real challenge for educators in today's classrooms. Teachers are expected to have high standards and to follow the Common Core curriculum in Math and English and Language

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Arts, which is very rigorous and demanding for students, even those who are gifted, and yet figure out a way to make the children with less ability to understand and grasp the concepts.

The State Department of Education has convened the Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC) to examine teacher preparation programs in the state. Rather than offer support for a specialization in teaching gifted and talented students, I would instead ask this committee to encourage EPAC to consider this issue within the context of revamped teacher preparations as a whole. EPAC is expected to make its recommendations to this committee by April 1, 2013.

In closing I would like to remind you that jobs are not that easy to come by for teachers with elementary certification. Teachers now have to specialize in PreK-1, Grades 1-3, 4-6, and so on. This greatly limits their marketability. To make a teacher specialize in Gifted Education will limit them even further since most gifted programs are in elementary schools. High schools and middle schools have honors classes as well as AP classes which provide gifted kids the ability to use their talents.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

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