

March 12, 2014

General Assembly
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

**RE: H.B. No. 5523 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY
PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFFING LEVELS.**

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

Hello, my name is David Glidden and I serve as the Director of Collective Bargaining for CSEA SEIU Local 2001. CSEA is a labor union that represents approximately 2,500 Para Educators working in school systems across our state. I'm here today to speak in support of House Bill 5523, a bill that would establish a task force to study issues relating to Para Educators.

The function of Para Educators in our schools is greatly misunderstood. Many adults don't know what Para Educators do because their widespread use is a relatively new phenomenon; a phenomenon that coincides largely with the mainstreaming of students with special needs.

Today's students, on the other hand, know what Para Educators do because Para Educators are now a vital part of the delivery of education. Ask a special needs student who the most important person is in his or her life at school, and invariably the answer will be his or her Para. Para Educators get involved with virtually every aspect of education from developing lesson plans to engaging in intensive one-on-one instruction. The truth is, Para Educators perform a lot of duties that are traditionally associated with teachers. And, in regard to special education, they deal with everything from the development of an IEP to dealing with toileting issues. And it seems that every year there are new responsibilities and expectations for our Para Educators. Because they are in this business for the kids, they take on their responsibilities with dedication and enthusiasm.

The problem is, despite the key role that Para Educators play, they are often relegated to afterthought status in any policy discussion or priority setting on education. Though Para Educators deal with some of the most difficult issues in the classroom, the training that they receive is often woefully inadequate. We also find that staffing levels are very inconsistent, with some school systems cutting significant amounts of Para Educator positions despite the demonstrated need to maintain or increase staffing levels. Finally, in most school districts, there is only one job title for Paras, despite the fact that there is an extremely wide range of functions performed. There is a pronounced need for a Para Educator career ladder with a graduated set of required experience and training. Such a system would ensure that the right person is performing the right job duties.

I thank the committee for raising HB 5523. It is an important first step toward correcting the problems that I have described. As such, I urge the Committee to recommend passage of bill.

Thank you.