

ADDRESS TO STATE LEGISLATURE

RAISED BILL NO. 5523

MARCH 12, 2014

I appreciate the opportunity to address you today.

I speak to you today on behalf of the Hartford Federation of Paraprofessionals and also as a Member of the Policy and Planning Committee of the Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) Division of the National American Federation of Teachers. I urge you to pass Raised Bill No 5523 establishing a task force to study paraprofessional staffing levels.

Paraprofessionals are the front line in providing educational services to children with special needs. We have the first, the closest, and the last contact with children in Special Education. And I can tell you from first hand experience that staffing levels are not adequate. There should be a one-to-one correspondence between paraprofessionals and children. That necessary ratio has not been consistently maintained.

Let me tell you what happens when a paraprofessional is given charge of two special needs children. One child may be a runner, that is a child who likes to run away from the paraprofessional. When that happens, the job of the para becomes instantly impossible. Does the para chase the runner, leaving the other child alone? Or does the para stay with the other child and abandon the runner. This is the way that children are injured. This is the way that paras are injured.

Even in the absence of such challenges, special needs children have, to put it simply, special needs. They need the attention of one person to help them through the educational process. How does a paraprofessional simultaneously deal with, for example, one autistic child and one hyperactive child. Their needs differ dramatically. What is effective for teaching one

child is not effective for the other. And both children suffer. Both are deprived of an education.

School districts plead poverty as the reason for failing to provide adequate staffing for special needs children. But they will gladly display for you all their spending on gifted children. The discrimination is blatant. It must stop. Special needs children deserve equal treatment.

Just last week the Supreme Court of Kansas, the highest court in that state, ruled, in the case of *Gannon vs. State of Kansas*, that state funding of education which fails to provide equal education to poor communities is unconstitutional. The court ruled that the adequacy requirement is met when the public education financing system provided by the legislature for grades K-12— through structure and implementation—is reasonably calculated to have all Kansas public education students meet or exceed the standards set.

I submit to you that if a court in Kansas found unequal funding of education unconstitutional, so would the courts of Connecticut. It is time to provide proper funding to educate the weakest members of our society. Act now so that the courts do not have to act later.

Shelly M. Davis