



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
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Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I serve as First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 29,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals and other school personnel. It is on their behalf that I submit testimony on a number of bills before this committee.

SB 25 Establishing the Office of Early Childhood Education

AFT Connecticut fully supports SB 25 to formalize the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood Education. As you are aware, in this state we are putting an emphasis on early childhood education. This is a very important step toward closing the achievement gap and ensuring all students have equal opportunities to develop and learn.

SB 26 An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education

AFT Connecticut applauds Governor Malloy for his desire to create universal access to preschool for low-income three and four year olds. It is only when we as a state begin to address economic inequities and opportunity gaps that we will begin to close the achievement gap. Improving preschool access is by no means a full solution, but it makes a significant down payment on that effort. This proposal builds on the 1,000 slots created in FY 2013 by providing 1,020 new slots in FY 2015 and paves the way for further expansion of up to 3,010 more slots by FY 2019. AFT Connecticut fully supports this proposal.

Quality pre-K programs set children on the path toward lifelong learning success. It is essential that students arrive in Kindergarten ready to learn and this proposal will do that, *provided that new slots are created at accredited school readiness programs*. Ensuring access is admirable, but only access to quality programs will yield the kinds of results children deserve and the kinds of results worthy of state investment. We encourage legislators to be vigilant in their efforts to make certain that only accredited institutions and not those “seeking accreditation” are eligible to receive funding for new students.

Expanding access to high quality preschool experiences benefits all children, not just those who come from low-income families. Children with learning disabilities can be identified earlier and offered interventions earlier if they are in high quality school readiness programs. Families who opt for more affordable daycare over proven early learning programs would make different choices if tuition were not the primary concern. AFT Connecticut encourages the Governor and the General Assembly to continue to build on the work of providing universal access to pre-K to creating universal preschool for all Connecticut’s children.

HB 5357 An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism

AFT Connecticut appreciates the intent of this bill and supports it with reservations. Chronic absenteeism is a significant problem in many districts. If students are not present, they cannot learn. However, we are concerned about creating a school-level attendance team that will be responsible for meeting and developing interventions. The bill calls for guidance counselors, social workers, administrators and a teacher to serve on each team. While we appreciate the effort to include a range of professionals, we are concerned that many schools may not have every one of those professionals available to participate. For example, most elementary schools do not have guidance counselors, and in many districts the social worker is divided among several schools. Mandating that a social worker or guidance counselor serves on these teams could be burdensome. In addition, requiring weekly meetings would put strain on personnel who are already feeling the pressures of not having enough resources and time to serve students.

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