



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
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SB 425 An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center

HB 5520 An Act Concerning the Availability of an Online Study Skills Curriculum

HB 5521 An Act Concerning the Storage and Administration of Epinephrine at Public Schools and Institutions of Higher Education

HB 5523 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Paraprofessional Staffing Levels

HB 5078 An Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

HB 5331 An Act Concerning the Implementation of the Revisions to the PEAC Guidelines

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Melodie Peters and I am the 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, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you to testify on a number of bills before you today.

SB 425 An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center

Last session, the General Assembly acted to address concerns many of us shared about the lack of transparency in the State Education Resource Center (SERC). In 2012, in the name of expediency, the State Department of Education bypassed clean contracting requirements by awarding several no-bid contracts to private consultants through its non-profit, SERC. Though it is funded primarily by public funds received by the US and State Departments of Education, SERC was not required to follow these protocols.

Public Act 13-286 clarified that SERC was in fact a state agency for clean contracting purposes and required it to comply with state procurement and competitive bidding requirements. In addition, it required the Commissioner of Education to report annually to the General Assembly (1) all contracts issued to private contractors and RESCs; and (2) the amounts and sources of all private funding used to pay State Department of Education employee and consultant salaries. It also required the Commissioner to submit a plan to transition SERC to a quasi-public agency, state agency or nonprofit. We are disappointed that SERC, through SB 425, has decided to pursue quasi-public status.

We fear that SB 425 could allow SERC to undo the contracting provisions required in Public Act 13-286 unless Section 2 (c) is clarified:

(c) The State Education Resource Center shall be subject to rules, regulations or restrictions on purchasing, procurement, personal service agreements or the disposition of assets generally applicable to Connecticut state agencies, including those contained in titles 4, 4a and 4b of the general statutes, section 4e-19 of the **2014 supplement to the** general statutes and the corresponding rules and regulations.

With a mission so central to futures of Connecticut's residents and more than 94% of its funding coming from public dollars, we believe that SERC should operate as it truly is – a state agency, rather than quasi-public agency.

HB 5520 An Act Concerning the Availability of an Online Study Skills Curriculum

As an organization of educators, we question the effectiveness of online coursework to provide remedial study skills to students. This bill does not specify how instruction would be provided in this format. Generally, students in need of remediation did not fully grasp the material being taught and require the assistance of an educator to present the material again, often in a different way. They greatly benefit from the personal instruction and interaction only a teacher or paraprofessional can give. There is a place for computers in education, but they cannot replace the one-on-one instruction that struggling students need.

Rather than require SDE to provide these unproven resources to districts, we would welcome a study on their effectiveness in K-12 settings before rolling them out for district use. I urge you to take no action on HB 5520.

HB 5521 An Act Concerning the Storage and Administration of Epinephrine at Public Schools and Public Institutions of Higher Education

AFT Connecticut appreciates the intent of HB 5521, but recognizes that this bill and others like it have been introduced over the last several years to circumvent the fact that we do not have enough nurses in our schools. HB 5521 would authorize epinephrine to be stored at schools so that it may be administered by unlicensed personnel to students who have no prior authorization for the drug. Nurses are trained to skillfully assess student needs. Even without a doctor's order, they could determine when it may be appropriate to administer epinephrine to a child who may be experiencing an allergic reaction for the first time. That much seems workable. It is troubling to suggest that all teachers, administrators, coaches or paraprofessionals are qualified to make these kinds of judgment calls.

We do not believe it is unreasonable for coaches, special education teachers and special education paraprofessionals who have received specialized first aid training to make appropriate determinations about using an epi-pen ***if a student has been diagnosed with an allergic condition and has a standing doctor's order for its use***. HB 5521 removes the requirement of the doctor's note and puts students and unlicensed personnel in a very precarious situation. What a teacher without medical training may view as a student with an allergic reaction may in fact be a student experiencing something completely different, such as a seizure or a stroke. Administering epinephrine in a case like that could do more harm than good. No teacher, administrator, coach or paraprofessional should be giving drugs without a

doctor's order. The best way to protect students is to have an appropriate number of school nurses to meet the medical needs of the school population.

HB 5521 puts us on the slippery slope of allowing non-licensed personnel to diagnose and treat children in school settings. I urge you to reject this bill and to include the School Nurse Advisory Council in your efforts to better address the issues the proponents of this bill put forward.

HB 5523 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Paraprofessional Staffing Levels

School districts have dealt with very tight budgets since 2008. During that time, with help from the General Assembly and federal stimulus dollars, districts have largely been able to maintain teacher positions. Sadly, the same has not been true for paraprofessionals. Since 2008, hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of paraprofessionals have been laid off across the state. This has had a significant negative effect on student learning. In many districts, due to an inadequate number of paraprofessionals, the impact is great:

- In New Britain for example, elementary teachers are forced to manage outsized classrooms of up to 28 children, including English Language Learners, mainstreamed special education students and those with behavioral challenges, without the assistance of a paraprofessional. It is an impossible task.
- In Hartford, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for special education students are often not followed. Students with IEPs that call for a one-to-one paraprofessional often receive a two-to-one paraprofessional. These assignments do not serve the student well, but are also potentially dangerous for paraprofessionals who are stretched too thin and risk physical injury with kids who need a one-to-one ratio.

In other districts, paraprofessionals are pulled out of the classroom throughout the day to monitor study halls or serve cafeteria duty. In previous years, these jobs were rotated among staff in ways that did not disturb their classroom roles, but now there simply aren't enough paraprofessionals to get everything done. Some districts are even using paraprofessionals as substitute teachers. While not illegal for paraprofessionals who may hold teacher certification or for non-certified paraprofessionals in limited duration, it removes the paraprofessional from his or her primary role of providing student instructional support in traditional and special education classrooms.

HB 5523 would create a mechanism to understand the full impact of these losses and make recommendations for improvement. I urge you to act favorably on HB 5523.

HB 5078 An Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

AFT Connecticut and our members believe strongly in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the potential they have to transform teaching and learning by providing children with the problem-solving, critical-thinking and teamwork skills they need to compete in today's changing world. This approach to learning moves away from rote memorization and endless test-taking and toward deeper learning that emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving. The standards establish what students need to know, understand and be able to do.

In order to successfully implement CCSS, the State Department of Education and local school districts must work with teachers to develop high-quality curricula and professional development, provide teachers and students with the time needed to try out new methods of

teaching to the standards in their classrooms, commit financial resources to ensure its success, and engage parents and community members. Then, the assessments should be field-tested to ensure that the curriculum, teaching and testing are actually aligned.

This is challenging, but important work and we have come too far to turn back now. Imposing a moratorium would undo much of the good work that has been done thus far and would be confusing and disruptive to students.

What teachers need and deserve during this transition, is a seat at the table as we review and improve how to implement the standards. That is exactly what Governor Malloy has done by establishing The Educators' Common Core Implementation Taskforce. Just yesterday, Governor Malloy issued an executive order, appointing frontline educators, administrators, superintendents, board of education members and parents to serve on a statewide committee that will make recommendations for improvements in resources, professional development and related procedures to make certain that common core standards work in Connecticut. This is the kind of vehicle that is needed for ongoing change. We need to use a scalpel to make key, targeted adjustments that can be realized in classrooms quickly. HB 5078 is little more than a chain saw that would leave students in limbo for an extended period of time. That wouldn't be fair to students or teachers. I urge you to reject HB 5078.

HB 5331 An Act Concerning the Implementation of the Revisions to the PEAC Guidelines

AFT Connecticut appreciates the intent of HB 5331, but the legislation is not necessary. Thanks to the work of Governor Malloy, the Speaker of the House, the President Pro Tem of the Senate, AFT and CEA, this work is already well underway.

The Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) has adopted new flexibility options for teacher assessments, including those stated in HB 5331, and is preparing to move another set of flexibility options in future meetings. In addition, PEAC is establishing a subcommittee of classroom educators to review the impact of the new evaluations and offer changes to the guidelines going forward.

PEAC is empowered by the statute to make these changes and is in fact doing it. This process is the most effective and efficient way to respond to the challenges presented by the new teacher evaluation procedures. Unlike the General Assembly, PEAC is made up exclusively of education stakeholders. Legislation is, by design, a slow and deliberative process. By working within the confines of PEAC to make adjustments administratively, we can deliver relief and flexibility on evaluation processes much quicker to classroom teachers than can be done legislatively. I urge you to take no action on HB 5331.

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