

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:

My name is Janette Smith, and I am a 23 year Paraeducator at Mansfield Middle School in Mansfield Public Schools and Vice President of the CSEA Paraprofessional Council. I would have liked to be at this public hearing in person, but school is in session and I am at work today.

I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5523. This bill would establish a task force to study issues relating to paraeducators. Parents and elected officials are now beginning to understand that as paraeducators, we have some of the most demanding jobs in a school, but many members of the public either do not know who we are or what we do. Increasingly, we work with special needs students, particularly the ever-growing number with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

However, there are many important benefits and considerations that are not afforded to our paraeducators that are for teachers, school administrators, and other public employees. As the responsibilities of the paraeducators continue to rise with No child Left Behind, RTI (Response to Intervention), and Common Core Standards, districts are not providing essential professional development for paraeducators to coincide with these mandates.

Recent studies demonstrate the positive impact that paraeducators can have on student achievement when they receive ongoing professional development and training. Paraeducators work in areas as diverse as clerical, guidance, library media centers, audio-visual, computer technology, one to one with students, ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), and the vast range of Special Education positions providing support for students and teachers. The intricate nature of each area warrants its own standards of classification with corresponding responsibilities, training, educational requirements, and equitable pay.

By raising the standards and staffing levels for paraeducators, this Task Force will only strengthen the quality of education for our state's students. I respectfully urge you to support H.B. 5523.

I also ask that you oppose SB 425: An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center.

Thank you for your time and hearing my voice on this critical matter.

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