



Testimony of
Stephen McKeever, First Vice President
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

HB 7021 An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation Program Efficacy

SB 1098 An Act Concerning Teacher Certification Requirements for Shortage Areas, Interstate Agreements for Teacher Certification Reciprocity, Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention and Cultural Competency

SB 1102 An Act Concerning Certification Requirements for Bilingual Educators

Education Committee
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Good afternoon, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischman, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Steve McKeever, and I am First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of local unions representing nearly 30,000 public and private sector workers, including approximately 21,000 educators. It is on their behalf that I am here to testify on three bills; HB 7021, SB 1098 and SB 1102.

HB 7021 An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation Program Efficacy

We agree that teacher preparation programs should be rigorous to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to best educate our students. For this reason, AFT Connecticut has been an active participant in the Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC). EPAC was established to advise the State Board of Education on the development of a system to approve, regulate and oversee educator preparation programs. EPAC has operated collaboratively as a diverse group of stakeholders, including representation from PreK-12 education, higher education, SDE, and other professional organizations. EPAC and its subcommittees have considered numerous aspects of teacher preparation programs, including how to evaluate their effectiveness. At no time, has EPAC recommended that student test scores be used to measure such effectiveness. We are therefore wholly disappointed that HB 7201 includes such provisions.

There are too many factors that affect student achievement that are beyond control of the teacher, much less the preparatory program. Socioeconomics, absenteeism, special education needs, language barriers and district resources are just a few of those variables. Some teachers will find themselves in a classroom with a high percentage of students with various special needs, while others could teach gifted and talented students. There would also be wide variance among different districts. For example, two teachers who both graduate with honors from UConn's Neag School of Education in the same year could have vastly different outcomes if they took similar jobs in different districts. That is not an indicator of the Neag School's success or failure to prepare them for the classroom. Rather, it is an indicator that districts are not uniform and that all children are unique.

We support Section 2 of this bill which requires pre-service teachers to have student teaching experience in schools located in Alliance Districts. By definition, these are low performing schools. Yet, Section 1 would punish a teacher preparation program if that teacher is employed in the same Alliance District and the students did not perform well. This sends a mixed message to pre-service teachers and to institutes

of higher education. We should instead be focusing on how to recruit and retain well prepared teachers to Alliance District schools.

In conclusion, we support a wide range of student teaching experience, including experience in an Alliance District. We do not support using student data to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher preparatory program.

SB 1098 An Act Concerning Teacher Certification Requirements for Shortage Areas, Interstate Agreements for Teacher Certification Reciprocity, Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention and Cultural Competency

We believe that SB 1098 has potential to reduce some of the barriers for recruiting teachers to our state. We welcome discussion surrounding this issue. However, we do have many concerns with this bill in its current form. Assessments (e.g. the Praxis exams) are a way to determine if a teacher has met the minimum knowledge base in a subject area to be an effective teacher. Section 2 calls for eliminating assessment requirements for teachers who transfer from out of state. How can we ensure that transfer teachers meet these minimum requirements? The bill requires the State Department of Education to develop interstate agreements; however, if we do not know what is in the interstate agreement, we cannot be sure certain minimum standards are being met. We could support language that would require the SDE to form a working group to develop mandatory standards to develop interstate agreements, and these standards would have to be approved by the State Board of Education.

A second concern we have is in Section 3 (3) which allows a teacher in a nonpublic school to transfer to a public school and be exempt from TEAM, the beginning educator induction, training and mentoring program. Without language clarifying that these teachers must already have experience or a current certification, a new teacher could potentially begin teaching at a parochial school for a few months and then transfer to a public school without receiving the support from his or her district and SDE during the most difficult years for teaching - the first two years. Furthermore, we are concerned that there is no definition of “effectiveness as a teacher” or “demonstrated record of improving achievement.” Who measures effectiveness? How does one show a record for improving student achievement? For these reasons, we cannot support SB 1098 in its current form.

SB 1102 An Act Concerning Certification Requirements for Bilingual Educators

We applaud the efforts of SB 1102 in attempting to remove barriers for bilingual educators. We believe that our students can benefit from quality bilingual programs. We have testified previously in support of extending the time a child can remain in a bilingual program and have advocated for school districts who wish to improve their bilingual programs. This bill is another step in building quality bilingual programs in our state. However, we do have concerns with some portions of this bill.

Section 3(b) eliminates the requirement for bilingual education teachers to be certified. Certification ensures that our teachers have completed the coursework and pre-service requirements necessary to be an effective teacher. There is also no prescribed process for a teacher to eventually become certified.

The state has appropriately set very high expectations for our students. These standards cannot be met if students do not have the highest quality instructors. Certification standards are the method by which

we deem educators prepared to teach. If we dilute or eliminate certification standards in certain subject areas, we handicap our students and potentially limit their capacity to achieve.

We see this bill as a companion to SB 1098, in that both bills are proposing elimination of teacher certification requirements. We cannot support either bill as written, but we would support the formation of a working group that would determine the requirements for interstate reciprocity agreements and methods to provide flexibility for minority teacher recruitment and teachers in shortage area subjects, including bilingual education.