



Testimony of

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***SB 972 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM
REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING SCHOOL
PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING***

Program Review and Investigations Committee
February 27, 2015

Dear Representative Carpino, Senator Fonfara and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My Name is David Case and I am a ParaEducator from AFT Local 4257 East Hartford ParaEducators, AFL CIO. I write to you today to testify on SB 972. An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review And Investigations Committee Concerning School Paraprofessional Staffing.

As a ParaEducator for over 25 years, I know how important the role of the paraprofessional is in the reinforcement of classroom instruction and the excellent assistance we provide to our special education students. We at AFT came to you last session with concerns about what we consider disturbing staffing practices across the state. It is not uncommon for paraprofessionals to be diverted from our regular assignments to substitute for a teacher or a fellow para or take on additional student support assignments.

In past years, I was diverted from my assigned classroom each day to monitor and work with an individual student in another classroom. Now while that student fell under our general program, this did take me away from my regular medically fragile students for up to 2 hours. I have also been used as a substitute teacher and been directed to fill in for another paraprofessional who was absent. Now while we would certainly help out in that type of situation, it is the practice that is the concern around the state. Districts throughout Connecticut need to be able to rely on better substitute services because otherwise this will continue over time to make it harder for us to take care of our students' needs in the best possible fashion.

I want to thank you for authorizing the study and thank the research staff for the thorough and thoughtful review of the issue. The final report provided many excellent

recommendations, which we believe if implemented would address many staffing challenges faced by school paraprofessionals. We are disappointed that SB 972 does not contain the most effective of these recommendations:

- **Recommendation #3:** Require the State Department of Education to inspect of a random sample of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) to ensure that the language outlining paraprofessional services is written with sufficient degree of specificity. This would prevent districts from drafting overly vague language that would provide too much flexibility in human resource matters rather than putting the emphasis on student needs.
- **Recommendation #6:** Require the State Department of Education to provide guidance to districts about how IEPs should be drafted to specify the frequency and duration of services and supports and provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate language. This will ensure that districts write IEPs clearly enough to avoid confusion and misunderstanding and improve compliance on a number of issues, including non-certified staff needs.
- **Recommendation #7:** Require the State Department of Education to conduct a random audit of a sample of districts' substitute teacher rosters and verify that each individual listed has a bachelor's degree, as required by statute. Currently there is not enforcement of this statute. Recommendation #7 would mark an important beginning and it would simultaneously verify that paraprofessionals are not being pulled from their duties to serve as a substitute teacher.

SB 972 in its current form, together with recommendations 3, 6 and 7 would provide the mechanisms to address the problems we brought to the committee last session. We urge you to JFS this bill with those improvements. Thank you.