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An affiliate of the
National Education Association

Testimony of

Bob Namnoum

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Education Committee

Re:

***Raised House Bill 7016 An Act Implementing the
Recommendations of the MORE Commission Special
Education Select Working Group***

March 19, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleishman, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Bob Namnoum, an appointee to the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group and a UniServ Representative for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 members who are active and retired teachers across the state.

We are testifying today largely in support of Raised Bill 7016 Act Implementing the Recommendations of the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group.

As a member of the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group I first want to thank the leadership of the co-chairs, Representatives Becker, Cook and Wood, whose dedication led us through countless hours of testimony and presentations, resulting in this bill. Our work is informed by the parents, advocates, members of the State Department of Education, superintendents and special education department chairs who spoke with us in our meetings across the state.

CEA supports this bill, with some reservations, for it addresses many of the concerns and ideas we have gathered in the past year. It was illuminating to all in attendance that there is little to no tracking of the federal funds the state receives pursuant to the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act or received through the Medicaid program for the purpose of funding special education and related services. HB7016 corrects this by ensuring that there is better identification and accounting of federal monies allocated towards these programs.

Many parents expressed a major concern regarding transition services for their children. While most praised their child's school, they felt the school was too focused on academic success for the children rather than the development of real life skills to help transition their child out of school and into the world as an independent adult. The language in this bill reflects this concern with a solution that addresses a need long overlooked.

Similarly, the provisions regarding a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) form – making it more user friendly – are more important than they might appear. It is important to note three things in discussing this portion. First, there is a striking need to create a universal IEP form that can be readily accessed when a special education student leaves one district and enters a new one. Second, it should be a priority to follow this legislation in establishing an Internet web-based digital IEP form. This would help to provide a seamless transition from one school district to another for special education students. Third, this form should include a section that allows for staff members to state any dissenting opinions. Originally most, if not all, IEP forms had a section for staff dissent, but over time this section has disappeared. It is vitally important that classroom practitioners have a voice in this process.

This bill also creates an Individualized Education Program Advisory Council – a positive step that can address ongoing issues that arise. However, we have serious concerns regarding the composition of this committee. The bill as drafted only includes one certified teacher as a member of the council. At the very least, there should be one regular education teacher and one special education teacher appointed to this council.

Regarding Section 12 of this bill, we are unclear how this language should be read against existing statute. Current law already requires 36 credit hours (interpreted in regulations to mean clock-hours). The proposed language of the bill includes 36 hours as new language and also adds "a course or courses of study in special education ..." It is unclear to us whether this section now addresses additional classroom strategies for teaching special education students, as it would seem that such strategies could be included in the currently required 36 hours. Consequently we reserve judgment on this section until its interpretation is clearer.

With the exception of these latter issues, CEA supports the intent of this bill and the ongoing work of the MORE Commission on this and other critical policy matters affecting municipalities and school districts.

Thank you.