



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

Education Committee
March 10, 2015

SB 1058 An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism

***SB 1053 An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in
Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two***

SB 1060 An Act Concerning the Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools

HB 6980 An Act Concerning the Timing of Teacher Performance Evaluations

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 a number of bills.

SB 1058 An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism

We support this bill and the proposal for districts to develop a committee of many different school personnel, not solely administration and including members of the community, to address absentee problems. We further support SB1058 calling on SDE to develop intervention plans for districts to refer to when developing their plans. However, we do caution that these plans are suggestions and not directives, as that could stifle the creativity of districts as they develop their own plans to address unique challenges.

***SB 1053 An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in
Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two***

We agree with the intent of this bill; children, especially at that age, need to be in school. We are concerned that prohibiting suspensions or expulsions will not correct the underlying problem, which is the behavior warranting the suspension. If this bill goes forward, we would like to see a requirement for counseling or other appropriate intervention be put in place to help the child.

SB 1060 An Act Concerning the Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools

We support SB 1060 An Act Concerning the Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools; however, we do have some concerns regarding the time limits for seclusion. A sweeping mandate on time limits does not allow for districts to write Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that are best for specific children. To be clear, we are not suggesting that students be in seclusion for any longer than necessary to ensure their safety and the safety of the students around them. We are suggesting that these types of decisions should be left to the professionals who work closest to these children and their parents.

Additionally, some districts have specific Alternative Education programs designed for children who have frequent violent episodes. These programs are staffed with specialists who are trained in behavior modification, de-escalation techniques, and the proper use of restraints and seclusion. Time limits on seclusion and restraints may render these programs less effective. We could support a study into the implications of this bill on those programs and develop guidelines if necessary to enhance the effectiveness of such programs.

HB 6980 An Act Concerning the Timing of Teacher Performance Evaluations

We strongly oppose HB 6980. It proposes several changes to the timing of the Teacher Performance Evaluations. We do not support changing the reporting of the teacher's evaluation from June 1 to June 30. This could lead to evaluations not being completed prior to the end of the school year, which would mean the teacher would not have time to make necessary changes over the summer. Another date change we cannot support is the proposed date for districts to adopt their evaluation plans from September 1 to October 15. This is not necessary because each district has a Professional Development and Evaluation Committee whose task is to develop an appropriate evaluation system the prior spring. In September of each year, teachers meet with their supervisors to develop teaching goals and student learning goals that need to be aligned with the districts evaluation plans. If a district's plan is not approved until October, it could lead to teachers writing goals well after the school year has begun.

In addition to the timeline changes mentioned above, we oppose language that allows the State Department of Education the authority **to approve** teacher evaluation plans and the authority to waive provisions of the guidelines. The SDE should only review plans to ensure compliance with the guidelines. These guidelines were developed in consultation with many stakeholders, including the Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC) and this committee, during the spring of 2012.

Thank you for your time. I am available for any questions you may have.