

Good afternoon members of the Committee,

I am Annie MacDonald a labor representative who works closely with paraprofessionals across Connecticut. UE (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America) members support SB 972 and would ask that the bill go one step further and include recommendations #3, #6 and #7 from the PRI study on paraprofessional staffing.

Paraprofessionals often voice their concerns that they have no idea how much time they are to provide to each student they are assigned or what specifically their tasks are while they work with a student. They are often told the students they are assigned to have IEPs that says access to a paraprofessional and that they are to provide support for the students with no specific as to what that support entails. Further frustration arises when paras work in multiple classrooms. How are they providing access to a paraprofessional if they are not even in the classroom? Are the students IEPs being met? Paras take great pride in what they do. For those that have been in this profession for a number of years, we hear over and over again "I am not sure at the end of the day that I met the needs of my students when I know they were struggling while I was in another classroom working with another group of students". Respect both the students and their paraprofessionals by including recommendation #3 to the bill.

As to recommendation 6 a policy brief from the Department of Education would provide consistency throughout a district but more important consistency within a school where a paraprofessional may be working for more than one special education teacher. Such consistency can only benefit the student in the end and be in their best interest.

Recommendation 7 addressing staffing of substitutes or should I say lack of substitutes is a major concern for paraprofessionals. Particularly this time of year when people are out sick, they know there is a very good chance that they will be called upon to substitute. What concerns paras the most is when they are substituting the needs of their students are not being met. Paras are aware that from time to time an emergency arises and they might have to fill in for a teacher. Paras are very much team players and are willing to do this. However when they see meetings or trainings that have been scheduled for teachers in advance and the day of the meetings the paras are told they will be subbing for the teachers they feel this falls outside of the realm of their job assignments and again question if this is in the best interest of the students they are assigned to for the school year and if the IEP is being followed.

In closing UE would ask that you consider including recommendations #3, 6 and seven to SB 972.

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