

Program Review and Investigations Committee
February 27, 2015
Senate Bill 972 – Support

Good afternoon, Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

My name is Cynthia Ross-Zweig and I am a ParaEducator in New Fairfield. In previous testimonies I have told you how ParaEducators work each day to support the needs of the individual students; and that without state directives on wages, training and work conditions, we are limited in our true potential as a highly valued participant in the educational process. I was pleased when this committee launched the staffing level study last year. Many of the recommended fixes laid out in the final report will go a long way address many of the problems facing ParaEducators.

I would like to make a note on the section discussing salaries; the report cites Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) numbers indicating that paras in Connecticut earn \$29,230. While the report does note that there is much variation between districts, my personal experience has been much closer to what was found in a 2006 report done by this same committee. The 2006 report found that the average compensation of Connecticut paras was approximately \$11.72 per hour or \$14,190 a year and does not include health or dental benefits.

Although I do support Senate Bill Number 972, my understanding is that while it does follow the recommendations of the “School Paraprofessionals Staffing” report. It does fall short in a number of areas. Specifically, recommendations about following up on *Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs)* to ensure that the language outlining paraprofessional services is written with enough specificity regarding the amount of time a paraprofessional is to provide support to a student and what that support entails. This is important because paras are sometimes being given multiple students who’s IEP specifies 1 to1 support and this creates risks for both the students and the paras alike.

While S.B. No. 972 goes a long way and is an excellent first step towards addressing some of our ParaEducator issues, it cannot be the end of the story. We will need to continue to fix the issues around how ParaEducators are handled in Connecticut.

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