

Erika Haynes, Resident, Windham
Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing

*SB 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the
Mastery Exam from Teacher Evaluations*

HB 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools

*Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment
Task Force.*

Monday, March 7, 2016

Good Evening, Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg and members the Education Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony.

My name is Erika Haynes, I am a proud mother of four children aged 6-21 and a former member of the Windham Town Council. I am proud of the progress Connecticut has made in recent years to ensure all children have access to the quality education they need and deserve. We've increased high-quality schools for the families demanding them, we've set the bar high with academic standards and assessments aligned to those standards that work to ensure our children get an education they can count on.

Today, I come to you to testify on three pieces of important legislation vital to improving upon the progress made.

First, I come today to offer my strong opposition to Senate Bill 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Exam from Teacher Evaluations. I offer strong opposition because this proposal prematurely and irresponsibly seeks to roll back on our progress made before the fruits of our labor can come into fruition.

An effective, modern teacher evaluation system is one that is fair, collaborative, and takes into account a number of indicators, including student achievement. We see from districts like Washington D.C. and New Haven, Connecticut that, by including student achievement in our evaluation system, that the caliber of our teaching workforce can be raised, thus providing our children with an education they can count on, taught by an educator that can uplift, inspire, and help them grow.

When the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council developed and unanimously agreed upon Connecticut's evaluation system, this was a positive step forward. But after a number of delays, we are now seeing petulant calls to remove the link between student achievement and teacher accountability. We should be moving forward, not backward. We should be devoting our time to ensuring full and effective implementation so our highest-quality teachers are rewarded for a job well done, and our struggling teachers can get the resources and support they need to improve their craft and enhance student achievement. This is what our teacher evaluation system was

designed to do, and can do if we see through the process and allow for full implementation. With that, I ask that you oppose Senate Bill 380.

Secondly, I would like to offer my strong support of House Bill 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools. When leadership from this committee, the Governor's office, and the General Assembly helped establish the Commissioner's Network back in 2012, it showed a strong commitment to making certain our efforts to close the achievement gap included improving our lowest-performing schools. What this bill does is ensure the promise made to those children attending our persistently underperforming that the state is doing everything it can to make certain their school gets the tools and resources they need to succeed.

We know from other states and districts that turnaround programs can work, and work extremely well. States like Louisiana, Tennessee, and in districts like Philadelphia and Lawrence, Massachusetts show us that when a state and its leadership are committed to effective turnaround models, bold and transformational change in student achievement can take place. If we are to continue investment in this program, we must couple that investment with necessary changes that work to improve our efforts, the Commissioner's Network program, and give our lowest-performing schools the flexibility and autonomy they need to turn themselves.

It is for this reason and many more that I stand in support of House Bill 5551, because the students attending our lowest-performing need to know we are committed to their academic success.

Lastly, I would like to offer my support of Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, and I ask you to take the legislation a step further in order to ensure our state puts in place policies that ensure every child gets a great educator they can count on.

The positive impact an effective educator can have on a child can't be understated - as we know there is nothing more impactful a school can do to improve the achievement of its students than to provide them with an effective educator in their classroom. Furthermore, we know that students of color, who disproportionately attend some of our lowest-performing schools in the state, perform better when taught by teachers of color in a number of academic indicators, including student achievement and attendance. And when we consider nearly half of our student body are students of color, while less than 10% of our teaching workforce are teachers of color, we know we must do more.

Part of our struggles to recruit and retain educators of color is driven by our current licensure reciprocity process, in which effective out-of-state educators, who want to teach in Connecticut, are presented with unnecessary barriers of entry that hinder their efforts to teaching and leading our classrooms. As we explore ways in which to increase diversity in our teaching workforce, we must also consider ways in which our state can create a system that actively recruits and retains

effective teachers, wherever they may be, and with particular consideration to candidates of color. This bill, as proposed, does not do that and can undoubtedly, and most certainly have room to innovate and improve our current system, including offering full-licensure reciprocity for out-of-state educators ready to help our students learn, grow, and achieve great things.

So while I support Senate Bill 379, and most undoubtedly support the extension of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, I ask this legislative body to amend the legislation to include the recommendations of the Task Force itself, while also including proposals to reduce and remove barriers of entry for high-quality, effective teachers to lead Connecticut's classrooms, particularly candidates of color.

Thank you for your consideration.