



Support for HB 5305, An Act Concerning School Paraprofessional Training

Testimony by Sheryl Elliott before the Education Committee February 24, 2016

Senator Schlossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Sheryl Elliott. I am employed as a paraprofessional at Bristol Eastern High School. I am a member of AFSCME Local 2667, which represents non-certified school employees in Bristol. I am also speaking for our parent union, Council 4 AFSCME, which represents paraprofessionals across Connecticut. Our union supports HB 5305.

I have been a paraprofessional for 19 years. I am certified. I have worked intensively, on a one-on-one basis with students with autism, behavioral and learning disabilities. I love the students that I work with and bring learning to.

But, paraprofessionals need more training so that we can do an even better job helping the kids. So often paraprofessionals seem an afterthought in our educational system. We are the ultimate utility players and clutch hitters of our schools. We are thrown in where there is a need, but often with not enough training.

For example, it would be helpful for paraprofessionals to have training in de-escalation techniques, also known as PMT. We receive that training in Bristol, but my colleagues in other communities do not. Some of the students that we deal with struggle to control their emotions and can lash out physically when they are frustrated. Paraprofessionals need more technical training.

Today's classrooms rely heavily on computers and data driven tools. While teachers are given extensive training with these learning tools, paraprofessionals are not.

This bill mandates one paid training day a year for paraprofessionals. While it does not address the total need for training, it is a good start. Training will make us better educators. And we are educators, working closely with teachers every day, helping with lesson plans, helping to develop IEPs. Teaching styles change. Curriculum changes. The terminology of education changes.

We need to learn as much as possible about how children learn. The science of teaching is in constant evolution. Paraprofessionals need to keep current with this ever changing educational environment in order to produce the best results for our children.

Thank you for listening. I would be happy to answer any questions.