



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
February 24, 2016

HB 5305 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING

SB 175 AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

HB 5308 AN ACT CONCERNING A GENERAL EDUCATION MULTITIERED SYSTEM OF INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORTS

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Patti Fusco. I teach Talented and Gifted students in the West Haven Public Schools and I am the Divisional Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 30,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you to testify today, as well as the behalf of the state's students, who cannot speak for themselves today.

In today's classrooms, paraprofessionals provide much needed assistance for our neediest students. Many work one-on-one with a student or with a small group, and make the difference as to whether that student will be able to be successful or not. Although a full four-year college degree is not needed to be a paraprofessional, they are required to either have a two year degree or pass certain exams. This is as it should be. We want the people working with our students to be well-prepared. This should also include professional development on the issues surrounding their jobs. They need to know as much as they can in order to be successful advocates and assistants for their students. This seems like a no-brainer, but in many districts paraprofessionals are not given any professional development at all. They are expected to somehow mysteriously know what the latest initiatives are and what approach to take with the students. This bill will force districts to train the paraprofessionals as it relates to their actual job—we believe this will help them to be more effective and more useful to the students they work with. Please support HB 5305.

I am also asking that you support SB 175 for a number of reasons. This bill would give the Department of Education the ability to enter into interstate agreements with other states to

help speed the process for certifying qualified educators from other states to be bilingual educators in Connecticut. Currently it is difficult for teachers who are bilingual to get Connecticut certification due to all of the Connecticut requirements. We are not asking for Connecticut to certify unqualified individuals, but to offer certification to those who are being effective in other states and territories of the United States. Highly qualified bilingual educators are in short supply in Connecticut and we have a rapidly growing English Learner population. We need to make it easier for them to get into our classrooms to help our students.

Another provision of SB 175 would allow boards of education to carry unused monies over to the city or town at the end of each fiscal year. This bill would allow districts to carry up to three percent of the funds paid to a district into the next fiscal year under certain conditions. This would be very helpful particularly to districts that have long term initiatives in place. Often these take more funding than what can be allotted in a single fiscal year and this ability to carry monies over could help expedite those projects. Sometimes funding doesn't get to districts in a timely fashion. This change would help districts not to feel they have to spend down every penny in June, under the "if you don't use it you lose it" thinking currently in place. If they could carry funds over, they might be able to use it more judiciously.

Finally I would like to speak in support of HB 5308. A system of interventions for students called Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI) was put into place in Connecticut in 2008. This was supposed to help students by forcing districts to plan to meet the individual needs of each student. This has been partially successful, but changes need to be made in order to ensure that **each** student is getting what they need to get a high quality education. First of all, the interventions need to be aligned to the Common Core curriculum which Connecticut has adopted. Secondly, this bill would specify what constitutes an educational support team for students, including experts in literacy and numeracy as well as instructional a behavioral interventions and accommodations. This would increase the ability of the general education system to meet the individual needs of **ALL** students, from the most challenged to the ones needing the most challenge, the gifted and talented students, who are often left out of the picture when considering interventions. Collaboration with families as well as communities and health and behavioral supports are also included so that the whole child will receive what he or she needs to be successful. I strongly support this bill, and hope that you will, too.

Thank you so much for giving me the time to address you today.