

One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

**TEACHFORAMERICA**

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**Testimony to Education Committee  
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Chairwoman Slossberg, Chairman Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Raised Bills 379 and 5550.

My name is Nate Snow, and I am the executive director of Teach For America-Connecticut. Teach For America is a non-profit dedicated to enlisting, developing, and mobilizing our nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence. We have over 190 teachers in our program partnering with schools and communities in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, Stamford, and Windham in addition to the more than 200 teachers across the State who are alumni of Teach For America. Together, they work to expand excellent educational opportunities for all students and working towards eliminating educational inequities that fall along the lines of race and class. Teach For America-Connecticut is also a state-accredited Alternate Route to Certification program that has been working in our communities for more than nine years and prepares and recommends approximately 80 teachers for certification each year.

Today I will offer brief comments related to Raised Bills 379 and 5550.

I would like to start by speaking in support of Raised Bill 379. Teach For America holds diversity as one of our core values. We believe that educational equity can only be achieved if we acknowledge and deeply value the perspective of teachers who share similar racial and economic backgrounds of the students with whom we often work. It is important to us to partner with others here in Connecticut to increase the diversity of the teaching force in our state. Among our current corps of teachers, 35 percent identify as people of color and more than 25 percent are from low-income backgrounds. 30 percent are the first in their family to graduate from college. We are on track to bring an even more diverse group of teachers to Connecticut for the 2016-2017 academic year, and we support efforts by the State to increase the number of teachers in our State who identify as people of color. Specifically, Teach For America-Connecticut supports the addition of language in Section (1)(a) that the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force should study and review "whether the Praxis examination, as currently administered in the state, has an effect on minority teacher recruitment."

From our review of the external research on teacher licensure testing, generally, we see that there is some external research which shows a very limited relationship between teacher performance on teaching entrance exams and the subsequent achievement of their students. We strongly believe that more research is needed on this topic as we have not found a definitive or compelling research-based consensus on whether many examinations being utilized to determine who can become a teacher and who cannot are actually connected to teaching efficacy. (See "Predicting Teaching Performance: Proceed with Caution," by Barry Wilson and Victoria Robinson, in *Journal of Assessment and Accountability in Educator Preparation*, 2012).



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This issue is particularly important given the myriad of recent reports coming from many states that these exams are often disproportionately screening out teaching candidates of color. This is especially potent when paired with other research showing the positive impact of demographically-similar teachers on their students, especially with elementary and lower-performing students. (See “Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement,” by A.J. Egalite et al, in *The Economics of Education Review*, 2015). As such, we laud the State for both its commitment to developing a diverse teaching pool, and also for encouraging research into better establishing whether the licensure exams used in Connecticut are acting as appropriate gateways to enter the profession, with a particular emphasis on teaching candidates of color.

Additionally, we would like to propose a change to the language in Section 3 of the same Raised Bill 379. As it currently reads, Section 3 states that, “Not later than January 1, 2017, and annually thereafter, the Department of Education shall conduct a survey of students participating in minority teacher recruitment programs offered by regional educational service centers or at a public institution of higher education in the state.” We suggest the addition of Alternate Routes to Certification to the list of recruitment programs. As such, we propose that the language in Section 3 should read, “Not later than January 1, 2017, and annually thereafter, the Department of Education shall conduct a survey of students participating in minority teacher recruitment programs offered by regional educational service centers, at a public institution of higher education in the state *or by an approved alternative teacher certification program.*”

As an accredited Alternate Route to Certification program, we fully recognize and support efforts to ensure that Connecticut teachers are engaging in ongoing and rigorous professional development. However, we believe that the language in **Raised Bill 5550 Section 2 Subsection (g)** is limiting and not aligned with current research on teacher effectiveness which suggests that the correlation between advanced degrees and teacher effectiveness is minor at best. The requirement that “On and after July 1, 2018, to qualify for a professional educator certificate, a person who holds or has held a provisional educator certificate...shall hold a master’s degree in an appropriate subject matter” may have the unintended effect of leaving talented, effective teachers ineligible for professional certifications. For example, many of our teachers are enrolled in the rigorous Johns Hopkins University School of Education Masters of Science in Educational Studies program. This program engages students in highly reflective coursework focused on essential planning, instruction, differentiation, and assessment skills. However, the proposed requirement that a master’s degree must be in “an appropriate subject matter” would mean that a degree from Johns Hopkins’ current program would leave our teachers ineligible for the professional certificate. Many other effective educators in the State would also be prevented from advancing to the professional certificate if the proposed wording remains. This requirement could have the unintended consequence of qualified, effective teachers choosing to leave the teaching profession rather than pursue a content-specific master’s degree. We recommend striking “prior to July 1, 2016” entirely as well as the sentence beginning, “On and after July 1 ...”

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments related to Raised Bills 379 and 5550.