

Testimony before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
Testimony of Emanuel N. Psarakis
March 22, 2016

Good morning Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive Nominations Committee.

My name is Manny Psarakis. It is a privilege to appear before you as Governor Malloy's nomination for the position of impartial arbitrator serving the public interest for the Education Arbitration Board

I hope my background and experience will commend itself to you. I have spent a career in the field of employment, labor, discrimination and arbitration law ever since law school when I first entered public service as an attorney with the National Labor Relations Board.

Following four years with the federal government, I entered private practice here in Connecticut, mostly specializing in labor, employment and discrimination matters representing clients in private and public sector employment issues. That also included representation of the state, municipalities and boards of education. I represented clients before various levels of state and federal courts, practiced before state administrative agencies and departments, and also was a legal advocate in countless

mediation and arbitration matters for the past forty years.

Having been appointed by Governors Dempsey and Grasso as an impartial hearing officer for the State Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, I presided over trials and issued decisions for eight years, including ones involving Boards of Educations. I was also appointed by Governors Rell and Malloy as an impartial Arbitrator and Mediator for the Education Arbitration and Mediation Boards.

Following retirement from full time law practice, I now teach at Quinnipiac University School of Law, in the areas of Arbitration , labor. employment and discrimination law, and am Director of the law school's Workplace Law Concentration program.

Since 2001, I have been a Parajudicial officer and Special Master for the U.S. Federal district court handling cases assigned by Judges Chatigny, Thompson, Hall and Droney, where I was a mediator and assisted litigating parties to settle their disputes. Also, for the past 13 years, I have served as a panel arbitrator and mediator on several arbitration and mediation providers such as the American Arbitration Association, the Connecticut Department of Education, the American Dispute Resolution Center and as an arbitrator for the state employees Review Board and several others. As such I have decided and mediated many cases of statewide and national interest for the

past thirteen years as a neutral.

Thus, I hope that this practical experience as a long time legal advocate, plus as professor of law and a demonstrated neutral arbitrator and mediator will be of value to your committee.

In my working career, I hadn't practiced extensively as a lawyer representing one side or the other in teacher union/Board of Education disputes. However, I am familiar with teacher employment relations issues involving education. I would like to note two significant experiences in this regard.

Just prior to my retirement, I and another lawyer in my firm were retained to engage in comprehensive analyses of all public labor union contracts for the city of Waterbury, involving approximately 3,000 employees, including contracts for over 1,400 teachers. Our charge was to analyze the prevailing patterns of negotiated labor agreements in Waterbury and compare them with similarly situated municipalities to see how Waterbury's labor contracts, including teachers' contracts stacked up with other municipalities. Our purpose was to provide a comprehensive outside objective study for use by the City of Waterbury Financial Assistance Board in overseeing what wages and fringe benefits ought to be included in subsequent labor contracts, all to help the City out of its financial crises, in

accordance with a Special Act passed by the General Assembly in 2001.

That gave me extensive experience in understanding significant employment issues in teacher union/board of education labor contracts not only in the City of Waterbury, but in numerous other municipalities.

Thus, I hope my background and experience in employment relations including in the area of education and working with issues involving conditions and labor relations as between teachers' unions and Boards of education commends itself to your committee.

Also, my interest in public education matters led me and my wife with another couple to start a foundation based upon the national "I Have a Dream" education program where we personally adopted and sponsored the entire class of 6th grade students in Hartford from the South Arsenal Neighborhood School (SAND) some 23 years ago. My wife and I spent 11 years with them from 6th grade through high school, promised to pay for their college education provided they stayed in school, finished their education and earned their way to be admitted to some form of higher education.

We immersed ourselves in their lives. We dealt with their families, their teachers, the Board of education, hired special teachers, tutors, mentors, and volunteers to help keep them in school and not drop out. Because of that,

became intimately aware of issues involving minority students, the public school system, and the struggles they encountered to complete their education. That helped me better understand the efforts of teachers and boards of education so students – even those from the poorest areas of Hartford – can become educated and productive citizens.

Recently we had a 20 year reunion with our “Dreamers” What a joy to see where they are now in life. Over 80% graduated from high school or got their GED certificate. Those that went on to college, some are working in Hartford municipal government, one is an army non commissioned officer who has served tours in Iraq, one, a UConn graduate, now teaches advanced Math at a private school, several are nurses aides, others are working in hotel and restaurant management, graduating from community colleges. Another is a Certified Nurses assistant, one with an associates medical degree in an oncologists office; another was in the peace corps, worked for the FBI and now is a federal parole officer.

This experience has led me to believe that for those of us who are blessed in life, one can and should do much for the public interest. I hope my skills and experience in employment, arbitration, labor relations and education not only as a practical advocate, but also as a demonstrated neutral will be helpful as your committee reaches a decision.

I am grateful to the members of the committee for talking the time to hear me in regard to my desire to serve as a neutral member of the Education Arbitration Board. I appreciate your attention and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.