



Testimony of Robert Riccitelli
SVFT Executive Union Representative
Sustainable Architecture Department Head, Platt THS

**S.B. 183 An Act Implementing the Recommendations
of the Department of Education**

Education Committee
February 26, 2017

Good Afternoon Senator Boucher, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education committee.

My name is Robert Riccitelli. I am the Executive Union Representative of the SVFT and proud to represent 1200 educators in the CTHSS. I also have been the Sustainable Architecture Department Head for 25 years. Even though I began teaching a long time, I still remember the stress, the frustration, and the confusion of my first years of teaching. Nothing in my life prepared me for the demands of dealing with a classroom full of teenagers from 7:30 until they left at 2:30. Nothing prepared me for the demands of IEPs, lesson plans, evaluation goals, parent calls, grading, and all the bureaucratic demands teachers faced. They face many more of those demands today.

As I work with new teachers in my role as Executive Union Rep, it's impossible not to relive those days. Teachers try to work in collaboration, but teaching can be a lonely job; when the door shuts, it's the students and you. For beginning teachers to be successful, they need veteran mentors that can answer questions, help them through rough patches, and support them as they try to improve. The TEAM mentor program, though imperfect, provided structured support for beginning teachers. We know how important such structured support is: a new teacher with a mentor is 15% more likely to remain in the profession for five years than a teacher without a mentor. Given the difficulty in recruiting new teachers, especially in shortage areas and in high school, a 15% difference in teachers leaving the profession has a dramatic impact on student learning.

This year's budget does not fund the \$500 stipend provided for TEAM mentors. The regulatory changes recommended by the State Board to mitigate some of the burdensome requirements for TEAM make sense to preserve TEAM in this new

environment. Yet the loss of the stipend for teachers remain. I work with teachers every day, and I am often amazed by their selflessness. What other profession is it so common for employees to buy their own supplies that the practice is acknowledged in the tax code? But there are limits. Teachers now pay an additional 1% to their pension, to cover some of the State's failure to make their full contribution. Salaries are flat while health costs increase. Teachers are now being told the TEAM program is so important that they are still expected to be mentors, but not important enough for the State to continue to pay for the hours they must dedicate to it. Teachers are now living a world where the stipend for being a mentor has been taken away, but a bonus for carrying a gun in school has been proposed. This current situation is hardly conducive to encourage people to remain in teaching.

I understand the Department of Education and local boards of education play an important role in the TEAM program, and with the loss of funding some of those mandates need to be addressed. This proposal addresses that need. But the most important part of the TEAM mentoring program is the support the mentor teacher provides. That funding disappears, and nothing is done. We cannot ask our teachers to make TEAM a priority when the State itself does not.

Thank you

