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Written Testimony of  
Michele Ridolfi O'Neill  
**Connecticut Education Association**  
Before the Education Committee

**Re:**

**SB 183 AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education**

**HB 5170 AAC Students Right to Privacy in Their Mobile Electronic Devices**

Good afternoon Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michele O'Neill, and I am the CEA Educational Issues Specialist. CEA represents active and retired public school teachers across the state, as well as hundreds of pre-service educators planning to enter the profession. I am here to speak about Sections 5, 6, and 8 of SB 183, and to seek additional clarity in SB 5170.

**SB 183 AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education**

**CEA reserves judgement on Section 5**, which addresses the power of the State Board of Education to revoke teacher certification for cause by expanding penalty options available to the Board to include probation and suspension. CEA is concerned about potential unintended consequences, such as the possibility that the caseload at the State Board of Education could expand due to the availability to the board of penalty options less severe than revocation. Consequently, CEA reserves judgement on this proposal pending further legal review.

**CEA supports Section 6**, which seeks to address a sticking point for many teachers: the exclusion of kindergarten from the elementary K-6 teacher certificate. Over the years, we have heard from members who did not understand why kindergarten had been omitted from this certificate endorsement. By including kindergarten in the certificate endorsement, certified teachers will now have the ability to apply for kindergarten positions they would not have previously been able to fill.

**CEA opposes Section 8**, which would allow candidates going through elementary and early childhood teacher certification programs to substitute semester hours with "equivalent" coursework. For elementary certification, the proposal would allow candidates to substitute three credits in history. For pre-k through elementary endorsements, the proposal would allow candidates to substitute six credits of comprehensive reading instruction.

Permitting accredited coursework to be replaced by vague, undefined "equivalent" coursework is concerning. In a regionally-accredited university, semester hours are generally taught by college professors with background knowledge in their subjects. The language of the bill does not address who would be teaching or delivering the "equivalent" information, nor who would determine who is qualified

to deliver instruction in this area. By allowing vague “equivalent” coursework, we are once more left wondering whether the quality of teachers’ preparation would be undermined. Connecticut has maintained high teacher preparation standards to ensure that students have the best prepared and brightest teachers in their classrooms. Any step should be toward strengthening preparation, not weakening it.

CEA is deeply concerned about continued attempts to reduce the rigor of teacher preparation programs, ultimately diminishing the accomplishment of receiving teacher certification and compromising the status of the profession.

In recent years, authorization for teacher preparation programs has been expanded to entities that seek to lower the bar on quality and clinical training. They do this in order to create more teachers, more cheaply, and more quickly. But these programs risk creating a parallel system that needlessly lowers expectations and sacrifices quality. CEA remains concerned that we are creating two, separate, and unequal preparation tracks.

In the end, many students will be taught by teachers who are less prepared to start their classroom careers. These students will disproportionately attend urban schools, where these alternative programs target their operations. Students in these districts already face the instability of higher teacher turnover that results in higher concentrations of newly trained teachers. We should be strengthening our teacher preparation, not undermining it.

#### **HB5170 AAC Students Right to Privacy in Their Mobile Electronic Devices**

**CEA seeks clarification in the wording of this proposal.** The effect of this bill would be to establish a clear process for the contents of a student’s cell phone to be searched. However, we believe that the language in this bill should be clarified to ensure that it does not inhibit teachers from temporarily confiscating devices in the event a student’s use is distracting, disruptive, or against school policy. When a device is temporarily confiscated, not searched, and duly returned to students, reporting and notification requirements should not be triggered.

We thank you for your consideration of these important educational issues, and for your time and attention today.