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Testimony of Ray Rossomando

Before the Education Committee

Re: SB 1069 AAC Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes

March 18, 2019

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, and I serve as the Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

I also served on the Task Force to Study Processing and Retention of Fingerprint Records and Criminal History Records for Educators. This task force dove into the complexity of FBI regulations and their interaction with public safety and education-related statutes. Chairman Kitching's leadership and the hard work of committee members are evident in the breadth and detail of the final report. Nevertheless, of no fault of the task force members, the problems addressed in this legislation leave our most significant concerns unresolved.

CEA does not oppose Sections 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the bill. Barring any further unintended consequences, these sections appear to bring our statutes into compliance with FBI requirements. **CEA supports section 3** of this bill, which addresses fingerprinting of student teachers. As indicated in the table below, student teachers, as non-employees of a district, must pay \$127 to \$177 per district in order to comply with statutory background check requirements. For student teachers who intern in more than one district, additional fees stack up quickly. This section is a first step in reducing high and repetitious fees on student teachers placed in one or more school districts.

However, there is still much to accomplish in resolving the costly and burdensome imposition of duplicative fingerprinting on student teachers, as well as substitutes and teachers who work in multiple districts. For teachers, particularly those in more rural areas, traveling to multiple jurisdictions is burdensome.

The most significant impact of the duplicative and costly fingerprinting system is its contribution to the pervasive shortage of substitute teachers affecting many school districts. Such shortages require reallocation of staff from duties, classrooms, or lesson preparation to classes that would normally be covered by a substitute.

Table: Educator Fingerprinting Fee Structure		
Employees of Authorized Public Entities		
	Fee Range Low	Range High
DESPP	\$ 15	\$ 15
RESC Fee	\$ 25	\$ 45
Local police	\$ -	\$ 30
Federal	\$ 13.25	\$ 13.25
State		
TOTAL	\$ 53.25	\$ 103.25
Non-Employees of Authorized Public Entities		
	Fee Range Low	Range High
DESPP	\$ 15	\$ 15
RESC Fee	\$ 25	\$ 45
Local police	\$ -	\$ 30
Federal	\$ 13.25	\$ 13.25
State	\$ 75	\$ 75
TOTAL	\$ 128.25	\$ 178.25

Based on a cursory survey of my peers in other states, we learned that many states have figured this out and have centralized clearinghouses for fingerprinting educators.

In **Washington** state, the fingerprinting requirement is tied to the teacher certification process. As a result, teachers only have to complete the process once.¹ **Nebraska** conducts educator fingerprinting through its State Patrol. **Massachusetts**² and **Texas**³ use statewide clearing houses.

¹ For information on Washington State’s system, see: <http://www.k12.wa.us/ProfPractices/fingerprint/Procedure-Fees.aspx>

² <http://www.doe.mass.edu/chri/>

³ For information on the Fingerprint Applicant Clearinghouse of Texas (FACT) please visit: <https://secure.txdps.state.tx.us/clearinghouse/>

Given that many states seem to be able to solve this problem. We should be able to as well.

Section 6 proposes a study of cooperative arrangements; we believe that such review would be redundant as it is already covered in SB 874.

Section 7 proposes to include sexual harassment and trafficking in health curricula. We believe that these topics are significant, and that students should be made aware of their implications. However, with passage of this bill, within the state required health curriculum alone, statute would require 23 specific topics and subtopics be taught. Meanwhile, each year there are numerous other legislative proposals that seek to expand the list of topics and subtopics required to be taught in public schools. Together they represent a significant shift of curricular decisions from teachers, administrators, and locally elected boards of education to prescriptions by the state. CEA suggests that legislators consider new ways for developing a model curriculum for school districts that engages teachers, administrators, and their school communities.

Thank you.