Bill No.: HB-7224  
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATOR PAY EQUITY.  
Vote Date: 3/14/2019  
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute  
PH Date: 3/7/2019  
File No.:  

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SPONSORS OF BILL:  

REASONS FOR BILL:  
Paraeducators are essential in an educational setting, and yet their pay, benefits, working conditions and responsibilities vary widely throughout Connecticut. The Commissioner of Education would provide evaluation criteria and data on a periodic basis of not less than five years to review pay and classifications and establish a rating system.  

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:  
None submitted.  

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:  
Robert Andrews, East Haddam, CT:  
Supports paraeducators receiving attention that could lead to creation of a more professional atmosphere wherein paraeducators are fairly compensated. Their contributions to thousands of students cannot be overestimated. There is a lot of variation from system to system and position to position.  

Yvonne Czado, Para/Tutor, Danbury High School:  
Has provided support within the Special Education program for twelve years. Assisting and working with these children has brought great joy. A paraeducator must “step into their shoes” to attempt an understanding about the behavior issues arising in a classroom setting.
Many paras have educational degrees and chose to work in this field. Due to funding limitations, paraeducators are not only underpaid, many positions go unfilled. The pay should be more equitable to make the job recruitment process more lucrative. After twelve years, she does not even make $14.00 per hour.

Christine Fiori, paraprofessional, Avon High School, CT:
As an Avon High School Special Education program para, we work in a self-contained classroom in a 1:1 setting with students who have moderate to severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. The student for whom I provide services has shown improvement over the two years we have worked together. She has become more independent and self-reliant, and her work ethic has improved. My pay is $19.66 per hour.

Angela Gardella, paraeducator, Voluntown, CT:
The bill is vital to paraeducators in Voluntown as our importance in serving the student population has intensified and expanded over the years. Paraeducators are responsible for student needs and safety from the moment we walk into a school building. While we work with a classroom teacher or administration, our own skills and how they are applied make us invaluable. My duties are varied within a typical school day: Reading in First Grade, Social Studies and Math in Grade Four, Math and Science in Seventh and Eighth Grade, along with lunch, recess, and hallway duties. Paraeducators have big responsibilities without equal compensation.

Sandra Garcia, Special Education tutor, Danbury, CT:
We paraeducators have experienced extremely low pay for too many years. I have been a tutor for a little over thirteen years with an hourly pay of approximately $14.00 or $17,000 annually. We work with some of our District’s neediest students: those with autism, Down Syndrome, learning or behavioral issues, emotional issues, and more. Our responsibilities have expanded, yet our pay remains very low. As a result, positions remain unfilled, students suffer because of being short-staffed, and their IEP’s are jeopardized.

Juan Hernandez, Connecticut State Director, SEIU 32BJ:
There are no statewide standards for paraeducator compensation, and pay varies widely from school district to school district. The bill will require the CT Department of Education to perform periodic and regularized evaluations of the compensation plans for certain Board of Education employees, including paraeducators. This evidence can be used in contract negotiations and collective bargaining.

Ron McLellan, President, Municipal Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 506:
High quality, accessible education helps shape children’s futures. Professions associated with the field tend to be undervalued and poorly compensated. This holds true especially for paraeducators. Classroom sizes have expanded, needs of students are greater, staff vacancies and turnovers are more pronounced, while the parity problem between cities and towns remains unresolved.

Donna Montalto, tutor, Danbury, CT:
A tutor’s job is important and essential as many students need guidance, individual support, and encouragement. I ask you to support HB 7224.
Carmen Muniz, Danbury, CT:
Supports the bill as a SRBI para of five years, and having worked in group settings, as well as, in 1:1 self-contained classrooms. Runs five Wright Group reading programs, as well as Guided Reading and Math Groups. One of my students could speak little English, and through perseverance and daily reading routines, she now is a grade-level reader. I firmly believe paras and tutors deserve to be compensated accordingly.

M. Rachel Nimer, ESL Paraeducator, King Street School, Danbury, CT:
Worked for fifteen years as a Bilingual Paraeducator and now as an ESL para. My hourly rate is $12.00, or about $12,000 per year. The students I serve are mostly ELLs, but can be dually identified as special education. Our responsibilities have expanded, yet our pay remains very low. As a result, positions remain unfilled, students suffer because of being short-staffed, and their IEP’s are jeopardized.

Courtney Poirier, paraeducator, Killingly, CT:
Supports the bill as it will require the CT Department of Education to perform periodic and regularized evaluations of the compensation plans for certain Board of Education employees, including paraeducators. This evidence can be used in contract negotiations and collective bargaining used by arbitrators.

Diljot Sandhu, paraeducator, Danbury Public Schools:
Each student is unique in their needs and without the help of paras, teachers are not able to reach every student at a personal level. We are often treated as glorified babysitters and often see within our very own school systems or government, people who think we don’t deserve benefits or fair pay. This bill would be a step in the right direction towards recognizing the true value of our work in education.

Kristen Scalley, Special Education paraprofessional, Ellington, CT:
Works for Ellington School District and formerly worked for Coventry Public Schools. As a young single mother, who is trying to pay her bills, it is time to hear our voice. As a high school student, having an aide helped to provide support and just the right amount of push so as not to slide backwards academically. “I’m now that support staff for my students and love my job. My duty is to help students get ready for school in the morning, by brushing their teeth, combing their hair, using the bathroom independently, in essence, by teaching social/life skills. A reward can be getting sworn at, kicked, spit upon, hit, having one’s hair pulled, or bit. I do not sit there babysitting your child while you are at work. I and every paraeducator out there is helping your child succeed in life!” Paraprofessionals are not getting paid enough.

Travon Zomback, ACES paraeducator:
Has sixteen years of experience, working primarily with special education teachers. Believes the State of Connecticut should ensure statewide pay standards for paraeducators. Many paraeducators work in challenging work environments and no two days, nor no two students or classes can be treated the same. They are there for both teacher and student. Their work is invaluable.
Calls received by the Labor and Public Employees Committee in favor:

1. Carol Forester, New Fairfield, CT
2. Karen Sample, Danbury High School, Fairfield resident
3. Ellen Russell, Dwight Elementary School, Fairfield, CT
4. Loretta Lecner, New Fairfield, CT

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

Reported by:  Bryan Anderson                Date: 04/02/19