

CHAIRPERSONS: Senator Douglas McCrory,  
Representative Robert Sanchez

SENATORS: Berthel, Champagne, Daugherty  
Abrams, Flexer, Kushner, Slap

REPRESENTATIVES: Barry, Bolinsky, Callahan,  
Candelaria, Comey, Cook,  
Currey, Devlin, Exum, Felipe,  
Fiorello, Genga, Gibson,  
Haines, Harding, Johnson,  
Kennedy, Leeper, McCarty,  
McGee, Napoli, Nolan, Parker,  
Petit, Sanchez, Sanchez,  
Smith, Veach, Welander

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. Good morning,  
listening public and Members of the Education  
Committee. I'm here today with my Co-Chair and  
the Ranking Members. I'm Senator McCrory. And  
then my Co-Chair will introduce himself, and  
the Ranking Members will introduce themselves.

But before we get started, I want to welcome a new  
Member to the Education Committee. That new  
Member is Representative Exum. She's here to  
join our Education Committee. Representative  
Exum, do you have a couple of words you would  
like to say to us? Representative Exum, is she  
there? Okay. Not a problem. We can move --  
we'll move right ahead.

I'm going to go over the rules, and then after that,  
I'll have my, Co-Chair make some comments, and  
then he will pass it to our Ranking Members,  
and then we could begin the public hearing.  
First, the hearing will be continued at a  
slower pace to accommodate the quality of our  
live stream. All participants will be muted  
until invite to speak. Disruptive or  
inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated  
and may result in expulsion from the meeting.

People who are rejected for the meeting will not be re-admitted. Members must raise their virtual hand. This signify desire to speak and wait to be recognized. In computer or mobile devices, open participant panel and click on "raise hand" at the bottom of the pan. So those are rules.

I also will advise everyone that we have a 125 individuals signed up to speak. Each individual will get three minutes to speak. At two and a half minutes, our timekeeper will give us - announce that the participant will be -- should be summing up. And after three minutes, if there are any questions from the Committee, you have opportunity to ask one question. And I'm really going to try to stick to the one question and maybe a follow-up, because again, we have 125 people that want to speak, and we want to hear the public. This is a public hearing. We really would like to hear from them. And if any Members have any other questions they'd like to take offline after your initial question, please do so. So with that being said, I want to pass it to my Co-Chair Representative Sanchez. Representative Sanchez?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for reminding everyone. This is, you know, a public hearing, and of course, we're -- we have about 125 people, so we want to move along today, or if we don't move along, of course, we'll be here all night. I also want to recognize again Commissioner Tucker. Congratulations again, Commissioner, on your appointment.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And I know we're ready to go. So I'm going to pass it on to my Ranking Member Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Sorry for the delay. Thank you very much. And I also would like to welcome everyone to today's public hearing. And congratulations, Commissioner, on your appointment as well. I would also just like to say. I'm really looking forward to all the topics that we're going to be discussing today at today's hearing, very important issues facing our school districts and education. So, ready to go, and looking forward to the discussion. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): And Senator Berthel. Is Senator Berthel would like to have -- a few comments from Senator Berthel was -- you available? Okay. Seeing none. Then we go -- we're going to go right into our public hearing. Representative Sanchez, I'm going to allow you to continue to call the names out. And then I will do the monitoring of the time.

I see we have the first person up is Acting Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker. Charlene, you're up. I see you have a team with you. When you come up to speak, please introduce your team with you. Of course, you'll get the first hour really to public officials, and then we're going to the public to speak. So I'm always going to call you Dr. Tucker because I just like that term on the speaking to existence. So, Dr. Tucker, it's your floor. You're up.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: All right. Thank you so much, Senator. And good morning, everyone. Good to be here with you this morning. And thank you for the recognition of this role. So good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel,

Representative McCarty, and Members of the Education Committee. I am Charlene Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner at the Connecticut State Department of Education. And I am pleased to have an opportunity to testify before you today regarding a series of important education-related proposals on your agenda. You have my extensive written comments pertaining to many Bills before you today. So in the interest of time, I will not go through them one by one.

I will say generally that, given the disruption to the delivery of education for the last year, the department appreciates the Committee's interest in passing legislation pertaining to social, emotional learning, and addressing issues that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these proposals support work already been undertaken by the department, and we have offered detailed comments on others for your consideration.

I would also like to quickly note that there are several Bills in the Education Committee this session that are identical or share similar language with Bills that have been introduced in the Children's Committee, which we have made note of in our comments to both Committees.

With that, I will stop here and direct you once again to my written testimony. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues that's joining with me today. Deputy Commissioner Naismith is on camera, and there are other members that will be brought in as we need to make sure that we can fully respond to your questions. So with that, I, and the rest of your team, we'll be happy to take your questions. Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Commissioner. Doug, can I start with one question here?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Sure. Before you get started, Bobby, Commissioner, would you like to introduce your team?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Sure. We have Kathy Dempsey, our Chief Financial Officer is on, Ajit Gopalakrishnan, our Chief Performance Officer, Dr. Shuana Tucker, our Chief Talent Officer, Irene Parisi, who our Chief Academic Officer or Legal Director, Jessa Myrtle is also on, our Special Ed Director, and Bryan Klimkiewicz and John Frassinelli, our Director of Student Support Services, as well as Glen Peterson, that does our social, emotional work as well. So we've got a whole team lined up here so we can provide answers as you need today. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Thank you. And Representative Sanchez, you're first.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Commissioner Tucker, or anyone in your staff can answer this. In Section 2 of HB 6557, it goes through some requirements about school counselors, social workers, family therapists. And as you can see in the Bill, it talks about a minimum of one school concept for 250 students and so forth. What would you say would be an estimated cost statewide, or maybe to a local school district to be able to get the staff because we all know that not every school district can afford to have one person for every 250 students? I mean, I know here in New Britain we probably have one social worker to like 400 students or so. But can you kind of give us an estimate of what you think it would cost some of our local Board of Eds in order to get to this number and to continuously keep this number moving forward?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you, Representative Sanchez, for that question. And while we have not yet done the fully cost estimation, but I know in the past, with a similar Bill, we've calculated millions of dollars for some of our larger districts to get to the numbers. And so, in our testimony, if you notice, we talked about, instead of working on -- and these student support personnel are critically important, especially now for students. So I would start off with that has been critically important.

However we've testified in our testimony shared with you that instead of working towards meeting a specific ratio, that we should really be working on need. And give our districts the flexibility when we look at all the support services staff, counselors, or social workers, psychologists, managing family therapist, to think about the need of their students, and to be responsive to that versus a particular number, again, based on the finite resources available. That is what we -- Representative, that we do.

And you should also know, that in the interim that we'll work with some partners like the Department of Social Services to examine whether there's Medicaid funding, for example, can be deployed, that districts can be able to use with behavioral health providers to support the needs of our students. So that's a part of it as well.

I will ask whether Kathy Dempsey or John Frassinelli would like to jump in? But we've -- I so appreciate that question because these professionals are critically important during this time. However, we want to be sensitive to the need of the potential cost of providing the service. John, would you like to jump in here?

JOHN FRASSINELLI: Good morning. Good morning. John Frassinelli. Yes. Thank you, Commissioner. I think you've covered it quite well. I would just add that, the differentiation between some of the student support personnel is necessary for a lot of reasons, right? So if you're a regional school district that only has high schools, you may not have the need for social workers or --, but you may have additional need for school counselors due to students getting ready for college and completing the FAFSA and career counseling and all of that.

So, and then in the younger grades, you may need more sort of board-certified behavior analyst if you have a lot of kids with autism or autism spectrum disorders. So that's why we say it's -- we think it's critically important for districts to determine their need based on their student population about, you know, what types of student support services they need based on their population that they're serving. More social workers or fewer social workers? More school psychologists or fewer? Rather than trying to get to a number of each. Because if you do try to stick to a number for each, then you're -- because the resources are scarce, you're not able to put those resources into the areas that you need most.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Do you see -- with the additional dollars that are coming in from the federal government, do you anticipate that local board of eds will probably hire more counselors and social workers and so forth? And what would be the implications after 2022 when that extra funding runs out? You anticipate that there might be some layoffs of these individuals because maybe local board of eds won't be able to afford to keep them on?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So again, Representative, you're right on target with some of the concerns. It is our hope, and certainly encouraging districts to look at utilizing those funds in this space for social, emotional work and support mental health. And so, they may very well be looking at staffing up, however, with a lot of care to avoid the funding cliff. Because the SR2 funds, for example, go through 2024, and then if you staff up and you will need to then make some adjustments if you're not able to continue those funding from other sources. So it is -- they will need to be strategic in that regard to avoid a funding cliff.

However, we are strongly that they find ways right now, as we're planning to go forward to utilize these funds, to address social, emotional learning, to be -- to address the issues of trauma, to address the issues of mental health with our students. That is so critically important.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner Tucker, and your staff.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: And, Representative, one last thing, in my eagerness to introduce my staff, I forget a very important person on with us today, is Laura Stefon our Legislative Liaison, who y'all know very well. So, sorry about that, Laura. I know you're here.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. No problem. Bob, do you have any other [inaudible] Sanchez?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I have our Ranking Member Representative McCarty has a question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And congratulations, Commissioner.



So good to see you. I just want to begin by stating quickly that I could not be more pleased to see that the Department of Education has made SEL a high priority. And thank you very much for those efforts and your very extensive testimony -- written testimony on each section of the Bill. I hope going forward that we can continue the conversation. Respecting Senator McCrory, I'm going to try to be good and limit my questions, but I have quite a few on the SEL proposal.

The first one deals with the student screening and the mental health screening that the department mentions in the testimony with the Devereux assessment. Could you comment just briefly on that particular assessment? I know the department is doing work on it right now. And you're mentioned that it may go forward in several districts very soon. Could you just comment? And then maybe address, how do we deal with parental engagement and letting our community at large? And does the department offer some guidance? How that should be approached on the district level?

But I'm very pleased to see the screening. And if you go further into the Bill, we also are very concerned about suicide in our youngsters, knowing that this is a very leading cause of deaths in certain age groups. And there is a piece there that also asked as to questions on suicide and then student success plan. So, if you -- and these questions are just related to assessments, but I will, as I said, hopefully, have more continuing conversation with SDE. And I'm so pleased, Commissioner, that you are on the SEL task force. I know we're in good hands. So thank you. If you'll just address those issues.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you so much, Representative McCarty. And what the

Representative is referring to is a Devereux, a strength-based assessment which we thought it was so important for us to do this and to have a statewide assessment that that was a part of the department procuring that, so we can have a statewide approach that is consistent.

And this assessment is a strengths-based research-based universal assessment that measured social, emotional development, and behavior. And what we know from the research around this assessment that when administered well, and we're able to put the supports around it, that has shown improvement in school climate in student achievement and early identification for students who are at risk and need more support. And we're also purchasing some supplemental assessments to address more targeted supports for children.

So it is a new, and so we going to roll it out in a phased approach toward districts with a lot of supports and a lot of training. As you know, with any new initiative, that that is critically necessary to make sure we get the results that we're looking for, so that the districts will -- the assessments will be available to all districts through this phased rollout process. And I've got the team here who's very much involved in making that happen.

Representative, the issue of suicide prevention. We're also looking right now at deploying some of the resources we have here to make sure that there's training that is available to our districts as well. And as I mentioned earlier, that we've engaged our behavioral health partners as well to be supportive of that work with us.

So I'm going to ask Glen Peterson, just to jump on for a minute, as he's worked with procuring that for the state. As I said, we may be one

of the first states that's doing this at a statewide level versus allowing individual districts to do this. So we're really proud of that effort. Glen, anything else you'd like to add specifically around the assessment?

GLEN PETERSON: Thank you, Commissioner. And thank you for the question, Representative McCarty. I know we've spoken about this previously. But the Devereux strengths -- student strength-based assessment frequently called the DESSA. There are two parts to it. There's a mini, which is a screening tool that a teacher could implement in just moments or just eight questions on the screening, but it monitors students' progress over time, just like a beginning of the year mid-year and end-of-year math assessment could track a third grader's math growth over time.

It's really not part -- designed to be part of the accountability index, but it's designed to be used by the school, by the district to look at student growth, and to look at also district-wide implementation of SEL. Sorry, someone else is speaking at the same time. And in any case, three of our districts are using it. These districts are part of the project grant that we received from the federal government, and we're working with DCF on that grant. And it's being used now -- they were using it before we got there, but in Middletown, Naugatuck, and Windham with great success.

We're in the final stages of contracting now. The contract's, you know, in the process, it's with the AGS office, actually. We'll be working with the provider, which is Adventure Education, in the next couple of months to start the rollout in the fall. It'll be a cohort model, and it'll be available voluntarily to districts, or at least that's the plan now. And we'll start with 30

districts in the fall, and then 30 in the spring, and then 30 in the next fall, 30 in the next spring. So it'll, as Commissioner Russell-Tucker was saying, it's going to be a phased rollout, but we'll get everyone in a couple of years.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So thank you, Glen. Thank you, Representative. And I know that the concern -- I'm sensitive of our time. But the issue of rolling it into accountability is something that we could have Ajit Gopalakrishnan speak to it, that is of interest to you now.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes. And I had made note of that, and we'll follow up with you on those discussions. But if you may, the point that I was trying to get across, and I just wondered if the department is going to offer guidance on the assessment so that parents are engaged, and that they know, and that they understand that this is trying to be helpful, and work in a positive way to improve behaviors in school climate. And I just think it's important that we don't overlook engaging our parents and letting them understand fully what the purpose is of the assessment. So, will you be offering some guidance in that area?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Yes, Representative. And thank you for restating that. We've been doing a lot of work around parent and community engagement, including specifically rolling out webinars from the Department of Education directly with families. So we have that opportunity to do that as well as to engage our Commissioners round table for family and community engagement in education. So we can message to your point directly with families. So they understand that this is not being done to them, or to their students, but as a global and systemic approach to support

our students and making sure that they're engaged as well.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And I thank you very much for those comments. And we will stay in touch. And I thank you for your answers and your excellent testimony. Thank you.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any -- Now we'll open it up to Committee Members. Any Committee Members, I have a question? Bobby, you got that -- you have -- you have the --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): -- the names.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes. Representative Johnson. You're muted. Representative, you're muted.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Better?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There we go.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner, for your work and your testimony. My question is, having to do with the school counselors and the clip that will occur in a couple of years because some of this funding is coming from the, you know, emergency relief funding. I wonder, in terms of the places where we have homeless children now, a homeless family, will there'll be a connection between the counselors, and maybe helping people get houses during this period of time, so that when the clip comes, we'll be able to understand whether

or not we've managed to get everybody back into an apartment someplace?

And if that coordination could go on between perhaps the housing legislation that we're working on, to make sure people are housed. And the counseling should be going through the school system. So, if you have -- if you can give me the information later or now, that would be great. Thank you again so much for your work. And this is that ongoing, very urgent thing that I think that we should be addressing, making sure all of our students are having. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: And thank you, Representative.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you very much for pointing out that we have to pay attention to our students who are experiencing homelessness. And that is something that we're working with other partners on. John Frassinelli, who you just heard from, oversees our McKinney-Vento, a program. And we're connected with our other sister agencies as well, and making sure that we're addressing the need. Every districts have a homeless liaison that we connect with directly. And that we're working with them to make sure that those students are not really left out with all the initiatives and everything that we're working on. So we can certainly provide additional information to you - I see John Frassinelli turn his camera on - because we're really focused to make sure that they are not left out or behind in any of the initiatives that we're working on. That's a critical population of students. John, anything further to add?

JOHN FRASSINELLI: Just exactly what you said. We're just continuing to do that. And just so you know, that, you know, the interdisciplinary team that are in school, school counselors, social workers, school nurses, all work together with the homeless liaisons to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Now, the Commissioner, in particular, has prioritized getting information about students are experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, making sure that those students, in particular, have access to devices and have access to connectivity through broadband. So the Commissioner spearheaded us to do that, and we're continuing to do that actively to make sure that those students, our most vulnerable students with regard to connectivity and connectedness, have those opportunities. So thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your response. Bobby, who's up?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah. Representative Welander. We can't hear you, Representative. We still can't hear you, no.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Let's come back to her -- let's come back to her next. See who's the next person on, and then we'll come right back to her afterwards.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't have anyone else with their hands raised.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Can you hear me now?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Yay. Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry about that.

The question I had was regarding the survey for the Commissioner. And I was wondering if you could just clarify some of the questions that would be asked. Would this be following the ACEs survey type of questions about risky behaviors or concerning behavior?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: Representative's volume was very, very low, so I didn't hear the question.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, we can't. Yeah, you're probably having technical difficulties.

Okay. We'll go to Representative Leeper.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And congratulations, Commissioner.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: Good morning. Thank you very much, Jennifer.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): And also, just a shout out to Mr. Gopalakrishnan, who I saw was on here. And I think he might've been on last week, and I didn't notice. Gee, that's nice to see you. I think I heard some of what Rep. Welander was asking, which is, are there going to be any additional funds allocated for municipalities to provide the interventions that might be identified as necessary through these additional surveys?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Someone has to go mute.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: So Representative Leeper, the surveys, could you just restate the surveys that you're referring to?

REP. LEEPER (132ND): I think the idea of the surveys is that, we recognize our children likely will have additional need for intervention. So, will districts be getting



any additional funding to provide those interventions that will be identified through the surveys?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: So right now, we are working very closely with our districts with the SR2 funding that they have received. And as I mentioned, last time we were together, we've identified four priorities for utilization of those funds. And districts are in the process right now of completing their application that's coming into us. They've done a needs assessment to help inform the strategies and interventions that they plan to implement. And so, that's our focus right now is the utilization of the existing funds that they receive.

And additionally, the department worked with the federal government to get some waiver authority for some of our standard title funding that can also be deployed in some of these areas as well. So that is a key focus for us going forward now.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Is this going to be a one-year sort of influx of federal funding? And then is there any path for after the SR funds, you know, have been used up, and how districts proceed after that?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: Certainly, that is what we talked about earlier about the funding and the care that must be taken as districts are planning. So the SR2 funding goes through 2024, the SR 1 was 2023, so there's a little bit of planning that must take place as to what would occur then.

And we're all waiting to learn more about the current plans in Washington for additional resources coming to the state as well. And all total, certainly we'll be looking at all of

that to figure out how does planning take place in our districts, can do their planning going forward.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): All right. Cause I think even at a district like Fairfield to meet these staffing ratios would be like 60 additional folks that -- and I would guess we are more well-staffed district than average. And so, I just raised that.

And then, one other thing about the reporting. Will, there'll be any reporting of the screening data? I know I have some folks in my district, who are always concerned about student privacy, and I just want to make sure that this type of data won't be aggregated and reporting in any way.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: So one of the reasons, and thank you, Representative, for that question. One of the reasons that we're doing a phased approach is so we can -- not only it's about implementation and fidelity of implementation, but it is also about figuring out what the data looks like? What is it that we need to do around the whole deployment? So certainly still need to be addressed in how we do deploy that, and what data would be collected or not in this case.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Great. Thank you so much, Commissioner.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: Thank you --

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you, Dr. Tucker.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): That's it for hands raised.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Well, if there's no more questions from the Committee, Charlene, and your staff, I appreciate you guys coming here and presenting for us. My colleagues might have some questions offline. I'm sure they'll get in touch with you. We'll review your proposals, and we'll do our best to make sure they come to fruition for children in our state. So again, thank you, Charlene, and thank your staff. And I will definitely be in touch with you around some of these issues.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSEL-TUCKER: Thank you very much. Have a great day.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): You too.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Doug, we have the Office of Early Childhood next, with Commissioner Bye.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right.

COMMR. BETH BYE: Good morning. Can you all hear me?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi, Commissioner, we can hear you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, we can.

COMMR. BETH BYE: Hey everybody. Greeting Senator McCrory. It was fun seeing your son on TV last week, playing basketball on national TV. That was very cool. Cairo --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): That was cool.

COMMR. BETH BYE: That was cool. I'm sorry. There are some other people here. Hi Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarthy, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Beth Bye. I'm

the Commissioner at the Office of Early  
Childhood.

First of all, I haven't had a chance to celebrate Miguel's approval as Secretary of Education. Congratulation to him. But really welcome to Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker. Charlene, it's always been a pleasure to work with you. We've been talking morning, noon, and night, so we have each other's cell numbers. And I think it's going to be so critical to have your leadership at this time, because I do think social, emotional health, and wellness is what's going to prepare kids to be ready to learn. And you know so much about that. Also, welcome to Representative Exum, and I'm so glad she's on the Education Committee now. She has been an educator parent. She was on a local school board, and she's a real advocate for children with disability. So Tammy, welcome.

Now I'll get to the Bill. I'm here to testify on a couple of Bills. First, I'll start with 6559 -  
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REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Commissioner?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Sorry to interrupt. Can you just make announcements for any of your staff that may be with you?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Oh, yes. Yes. I was recognizing all the Legislators, forgot about my team that's been working around the clock. With me is Michael Curley, our Legal Director. Deb Flis, who oversees our quality improvement initiatives and is helping oversee early childhood ed right now, as we replace that division director. Elena Trueworthy who, not only has been overseeing the Head Start Collab

Office, she's also been leading the decision-making and public input process for the most recent relief dollars. And Maggie Adair, who many of you know who's our incredible policy person, but she's also been turned into a communications person during the pandemic, and spending a whole lot of time making sure that people have the information they need. So, really grateful for my team. Anything else? Representative, should I just carry on with the testimony?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah. You can go right to your Bill.

COMMR. BETH BYE: Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

COMMR. BETH BYE: So, I'm going to testify about 6559 and 6558 today. I'm going to start with 6559. I'm not going to read my testimony, I'm going to give you a broad overview, and then I'm happy to take questions.

First of all, our agency Bill proposes a set of early care and education legislative changes aimed at elevating the voices of families to ensure our state-funded early care and education program is meeting family and community needs. Second, to advance racial equity and transparency, and decision-making through changes in school readiness councils. Third, to create mechanisms, to address a shortage of high-quality infant-toddler care. And four, to increase the fiscal stability of our state-funded providers.

Section 1 adds an explicit goal that emphasizes the importance of promoting socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity within classrooms, amongst staff at facilities, any that received state

funding, cause that's what we have control over.

Section 2 to 5, allow the Office of Early Childhood to allocate state funds for licensed family childcare service within available appropriation. So that's a change, it's always been allocated to centers, but this will help address the infant-toddler challenge. So -- and also more specifically, Section 2 allows the Office of Early Childhood to administer school readiness funds through contracts to reduce the burden on providers who sometimes now are answering to three different programs within OEC to try to make our processes align across state funding streams.

Section 3 amends school readiness council membership to increase parent participation requiring efforts to ensure the council make up better reflects the racial diversity of the community. During our systems reform work, when we went to different parts of the state, this was a problem, again and again; it came up. And governance community members didn't feel they had a real voice on councils. And Connecticut was really at the forefront across the country, having local school readiness councils. Now we need to make sure they're updated for the current day, but that the parents really have a voice. And that the council also gets to pick its own leadership. They've been sort of direct appointments. So, this is in response to some listening to the field and to communities.

So, we think we really need to lift up parent voice -- parents from that community, and we believe that we'll support equity, and it will also give us places where OEC could offer support. Elena Trueworthy, in her office, and Shanae Russell have both been working to build a parent cabinet to bring that to our governance.

Section 6 will support a quality improvement system that helps us be more supportive to move from licensed care to high quality in a supportive way versus a sort of a strict regulatory way.

Section 7 to 10, make updates to the background checks. And I'm happy to go over if you have questions about that.

Section 4, deletes references to nurturing family network -- nurturing families network, and refer now to a Connecticut Home Visiting System. We are moving to a single system of home visiting versus a federal separate from the state, to be more uniform and regionally based.

Section 16 clarifies that folks who are subject to a settled civil penalty for operating a youth camp without a license have the right to adhering. Right now, camps do not have that right, so that's just sort of making balance and regulations.

Okay. Next is House Bill 6558. And again, I'll just -- I'm not going to read my testimony, I'll just hit the highlights. AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT. We really strongly support Section 1 of this Bill that would establish a pilot program in five communities to allow family childcare home license to be issued to a provider who wishes to operate outside of residents in an incubator space.

Just this morning I read about a family childcare provider that opened her own center. I think this pilot will help us see how folks who have successful home-based family childcare can move to either group homes and then small centers. But we've got to give some flexibility in the

statutes and regulations to allow that sort of business development to go on because they're often really valued community resources, and we need to help them grow their businesses. Right now, there's no sort of logical way to do that. It's all or nothing. So I'm excited about that pilot.

The next part, Section 4, expands allowable activities under Care 4 Kids to include higher ed even start in adult ed. Well, certainly we support this concept and have been working on ways to support childcare during workforce development with our work on the workforce council. The cost estimates for this are not in the budget, so we can't support something where there's not funding to do it. But I will submit to this Committee, that in conversations with the Governor as recently as the last two weeks, he has really asked us to look at our last pot of federal money. We added a little bit more to workforce development to be able to support some small pilots that are going on with additional funds, that, he literally said, "Go back to the drawing board and figure out how you can help workforce development more."

He also assigned \$5 million dollars of his own CRF dollars that were used with workforce sports to supply childcare and support childcare infrastructure during the pandemic. And he wants us to just think through the new dollars coming and how those can help with workforce development, as well as, how do we make the childcare market work? We had a conversation about, you know, how do we [coughs] excuse me, get to the full cost of quality? How do we help more families with childcare? And I think we sort of have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with what passed this weekend to be thinking about that in Connecticut. And we will really look for your feedback on that.



But certainly, workforce development childcare will be part of that.

The next thing, Section 7 of that Bill has a task force to -- Oh, okay, sorry. Section 7 of the Bill, I know I worked with -- talked to Senator McCrory about this early in the session. And I know, Representative, that this is important to you, is looking at the professionalizing of the early childhood field, and working across the country with other states to come up with more uniform standards and higher ed curricula to, again, have a stairway to early childhood workforce development. And we're working with faculty at Southern and University of Hartford to get this going. So, we're really excited about your proposal to help early education, higher education programs, in school districts to work together on early childhood certification.

The example I gave to represent McCrory about how mixed up things are -- is, you could get your early childhood teacher credential in Connecticut, four-year sort of certification. And you could teach in public school in Vermont and Massachusetts, but you can't teach in public school in Connecticut with an early childhood teacher credential, what we call the ECTC. So a lot of things have to be fixed. You know, Charlene and I are going to be working together. Early childhood does cross both, and we've got to work on credentials that can work. So I think this is really needed. It aligns with some federal work. So, I think it also places equity.

What we don't want to happen in early childhood is, we have this great workforce. We don't want to suddenly say, "Everyone has got to be certified just like public school teachers." We've got to offer a ladder and support, and make sure we don't lose the great workforce that we have

right now as we move to improving the system and looking at our credentials. So, we really want to line up with the national work there. And I do think the study will be needed. So it advances that in Connecticut. So that, I'll stop there. And I'm happy to answer questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Commissioner. And I'll just add, you know, we've been working on this, especially my own, ECTC. I think your efforts are very important. We've been talking about this for a while. We have to get this done. I think the timing is perfect right now for us to look at these credentials. We're pretty much out of line with all the other states in our area, and we need to get focused on getting Connecticut in line. So, I'm going to save my comments till afterwards, I'll talk privately to you. But I would like to open the floor to my Co-Chair. He has a question for Commissioner, and then we'll go to our Ranking Members, and then to the Committee. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I have hundreds of questions, but I'm going to limit it to two.

COMMR. BETH BYE: I'm sure.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): One of the really important questions that I have, of course, is in regards to workforce development. I think there's somebody else. Okay, there we go. Workforce development. We know that with this pandemic, we have heard that many [inaudible] throughout the State of Connecticut. There's more need for childcare, particularly for people that are trying to get work -- trying to get back into the workforce.

So, my question is, I know you had mentioned earlier that the Governor had set aside \$5 million dollars towards this. I'm just hoping that

some way we can set an additional \$5 million moving forward, because it's going to be really needed in the next three to six months as we get more people vaccinated and more people eager to search for jobs. And of course, we need childcare. Many of these individuals will need childcare. So that's one question on how -- what do you see in the future for that?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): The other part, in regards to opening this up -- well, the other thing I really had, and we've talked about this earlier, was about the compensation schedule. You know, that's something that's been always on my mind for years. And I know that your department has been working on a compensation schedule. I'm just wondering how close are you to coming up with the end of that study? I know that you had asked for an extension. I'm just wondering if you're close to, you know, giving us some answers about how we can come up with a sliding scale to help our staff?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah, thank you. Well, there are a couple of things in motion related to workforce development. The CRRSA funds, that is, the dollars second round, in Connecticut, that was approved. Our plan was approved last week by the Feds. So, we could begin to spend the money. So you have to send in a plan, that was approved. We can -- the Governor had to approve it. Then the Feds approved it. And now we can move forward.

And there are funds in there for people in workforce training. We are leveraging the SNAP Education and Training program that we have going right now in Connecticut, where we have a great pilot going with CSCU to give people who qualify for SNAP Education and Training certificate programs, childcare certificates of a sort.

It's not part of care for kids. It's separate. It's administered through the college's SNAP funds. And we're proposing, even though they won't be matched cause they're not state dollars, but we're proposing adding to that. So then it's like, when students are there saying, "I want to take these classes." You know, there's actually that support at the college to connect them with childcare.

We're also hoping to use it. And, Representative Sanchez, I know this is something that matters to you. Some of the dollars for our lab schools on campus, they really got hit hard during the pandemic because people weren't coming to school. But we don't want to lose that supply of childcare right on campus. And we believe, you know, I know there's a lab school in development as well, that we want to set aside some funds to both plan and support lab schools, to both supply childcare, but also, you know, to Senator McCrory's point, help with our workforce development. So we set aside some funds there. And then we're working with CSCU. We're in conversations around expanding the seek campus program. There are federal dollars on about nine campuses right now to add dollars there.

The other thing the Governor asked us to do was to look at, could we leverage 211 to help families, that are trying to get jobs, but don't have them with employers who are restarted? He was particularly interested in the restaurant, and retail industry trying to set up a dedicated line as their workforce is trying to come online. They might not be working yet, so they don't get childcare, but they can't work till they have childcare. So he asked us to try to align those two things. But that's different than workforce development. It is different than workforce development training. So that's, that's on the workforce side. On the

compensation schedule, I know that we're working on that with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. I can get back to where they are in that process. I know they're working on it.

But I also think, in the section that I talked to Senator McCrory about, we cannot underestimate how important the power to the professional work is coming out of NAEYC, because all of that work that they're trying to do state by state, and they're developing model legislation probably for next session for state's compensations first. And you can't make these requirements without showing sort of how you're going to get to the full cost of quality. And I think we have to have those conversations with the new stimulus dollars as well. How can we get to paying the full cost of quality before we go and think about expanding access? We always pick access over paying the full cost, and it's just weaken the system little by little over the past 20 years. So we're having those conversations, and looking for some best practices nationally on that.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Commissioner. Doug, I think we have Representative McCarty with a question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I didn't hear him, but thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome, Commissioner and your staff. It's so nice to see you today. Thank you very much.

COMMR. BETH BYE: You too.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I know we have your written testimony. So, I would like to just give you the opportunity to have some flexibility with your comments. I know that this pandemic has been so difficult on our early childcare centers, and we discussed work develop -- force

in all those areas. But could you just give us your view of how -- where you think we are and where -- how we're going to get to where we need to be? It's a big question, so whatever you can do with that.

And then, I'm also, if you'll comment on the other Bill with the Care 4 Kids offering that to individuals that are continuing their education. How you see that helping as we move forward? Particularly, I was happy to see the Even Start program in that recommendation. And just if you could comment, I know I'm cheating a little trying to get in more than one, but the Birth-to-Three program has always been a strong interest of mine. So, I would appreciate anything you can comment on those areas.

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah. Thank you. Let me start with Birth-to-Three, because in my, trying to get through the testimony quickly, I skipped Section 16 of our Bill which does address sort of the teacher shortage in Birth-to-Three and opens up, we're working with the State Department of Education on opening up the sort of the teacher qualifications there as well. So it's not just the 112 endorsement, that there's 113, and other endorsements that Birth-to-Five can be endorsements use to work in Birth-to-Three.

So I wanted to say that, we're also in conversations, you know, Representative the work we did on that Committee, really, we weren't planning on a pandemic, but it helped us be ready to help families last spring and offer Birth-to-Three through the summer, so families didn't have to transition. You know, if they turned three in April, they didn't have to transition to their public schools, which weren't even open. And then to their elementary school, after that. So our Birth-

to-Three providers, they costs about half a million dollars, but we were able to maintain that.

And we're in discussions right now with the State Department of Education about this coming summer and how we're going to manage that. So that work that you promoted has resulted in hundreds of kids getting services who may have skipped them all together last spring and summer. So that transition between Birth-to-Three in public schools is really important. So that's a Birth-to-Three.

On how childcare is doing, providers are really struggling. They're really struggling. They depend on about 85 to 90 percent enrollment to meet payroll and their expenses. And on average, they've operating at about 70% of enrollment and some much less. And the places with the lowest enrollments are definitely in our, what we used to call, priority school districts in some of our cities with the most families that are struggling with resources. So that's a big concern of ours because we can't afford to lose supply in our priority districts of childcare. So we've done a lot to sort of hold them up during the pandemic, but they're still really suffering.

As are, you know, I think, across the state, those aren't the only program suffering. Everyone's suffering. It's like a business like the airlines where families are slow to come back till they feel comfortable that things are going well. And things have been going well. You know, the spread in centers has been mostly very limited. The number of cases for the number of programs open is not very high. But there's still that fear factor among parents. Providers have been spending extra money on PPE. You know, they just have additional expenses all over the place because they're

trying to cohort. So if they have a sub, the sub can't go in more than one room, so then you have to bring in two subs, like there's just on and on.

So I think the federal funds have been helpful, and the grants have been helpful. And we have another round that will be going out within the next two months. Those grants, we got approval from the feds last week, and so that grant process will open up very soon. And then it usually takes, you know, six or eight weeks to get the payments, you know, from the minute you apply to get the payments out the door. But the round of funding that passed this weekend is a game changer for early childhood. And the Governor has asked me to see how we can make the market work better. And I think we'll be looking for feedback from you all. And I'll be thinking about structurally what the Governor asked, "How do we make this market work?" So things are really, and we've lost hundreds of programs during the pandemic.

That said, the supply is there because there's still a lot of hesitancy about coming back. Now that said, there are some programs that have been begging us to go back up to the group size 20, cause they have a lot of families that want to come in, and they're limited to 16 per classroom. And the Governor announced last week. Class sizes go up to 20 for those that have that demand beginning at the end of March.

So, things are difficult. And as for the workforce, just to try to get through your questions quickly. I know there are others with questions. We really, we do think the childcare is part of the path to getting a living wage, and workforce training as part of that path. And so, the fact that in Connecticut, one of two or three states where childcare is disconnected from workforce



training, we have a big barrier. And the Governor's Workforce Council, I lead the equity subcommittee. We've been looking at this and looking at strategies to support people in workforce development.

Currently, we do try to refer those families can attend head start school readiness, and 20% of child daycare slots are put aside for folks who either are in workforce training or out of work. So, there are some paths, but not nearly enough. And we do think collaborating with CSCU and making solutions that make sense for folks in the workforce really is what we need to do. Those are my quick, not so quick, but my quickest possible answers to your three big questions.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I thank you very much, Commissioner. And I will stay in touch with you. And I thank you and your agency for all the great work. I know you're very creative, and you try so hard. So we'll keep monitoring, and we're here to support you. Thank you.

COMMR. BETH BYE: And we're happy to come meet with you anytime and sort of share what's happened so far, and listen to your ideas about what else could happen based on conversations in your district.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Commissioner.  
Any other questions from the circle?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Comey.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. Hello Commissioner Bye, good to see you, and thank you for your testimony. I was

happy to hear some of the sort of aligning your paperwork, the paperwork hoops that our providers and parents have to jump through.

I really think that that shows that your office is really listening to our providers. I think that that's such a wonderful just example of how we can just keep doing better. So thank you for that. And also the work of breaking down those silos, just it's very -- it's going to be very good for the industry. As well as just the school readiness council. I sit on my local school readiness council, and the picking your own leaderships and, you know, making sure that our physicians represent the folks in our community, and that the people on the Committee are with that. I think that that's a good, you know, that can really only just benefit those being served by the school readiness council.

I guess, you know, priorities are so hard for everyone, and we would love to be able to do everything that we can, but we have a limited financial way to do the, you know, finances to do that. What I didn't really hear from or see in some of this, and perhaps you can point out maybe some examples. How are we making care more affordable for our parents? And how are we providing, sort of on the back of that, the flexibility that parents will need as we have access to, you know, workforce development and things like that.

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah. I really appreciate that question, Representative. And that is definitely on the Governor's mind. How do you make it more affordable for families? One thing in our current plan that got approved by the feds last week is that, for anyone on Care 4 Kids in the state for six months, you know, while we're in this recovery period, we'll pay the parent fees. And this both helps the parents on Care 4 Kids, and it helps programs.

Because when parents can't afford to pay the programs, often the programs say, "Well, we'll just take the Care 4 Kids." And that leaves the program short.

So in the short-term paying parents fees has been approved as part of our CRSA plan. But that's for families making less than 50% of the state median income. So it's a very particular subset, and every family's struggling with childcare. I think the biggest change can come, well, first of all, being able to get grants out to programs helps them not raise the price more, given all the extra costs they're having during COVID, and there'll be -- so the first package, Connecticut got, well, the federal was \$3 Billion. The second package was \$10 Billion. And the one that passed this weekend was \$39 Billion for childcare. So we had about \$23 million dollars. We use some of that for grants to programs to just help them stay open, and hopefully not have to raise the fees too much.

This second round will be more, likely more significant grants because of the additional money, a full 65% will go right out the door, back to programs to help sustain their infrastructure. And again, help not raise the prices given the extra costs.

Now what passed this weekend, you know, are the kind of dollars that we'll be looking to use creatively to accomplish two things. One, to keep the programs open, pay, you know, pay, help them at a level that is the real cost of quality cause we're not paying the full class quality. And second, help make childcare affordable for more families.

And again, the Governor's particularly interested in workforce development. So we'll be looking at

strategies around using childcare to help families find a pathway to a living wage, as well as he wants us to look at childcare for the hardest-hit industries, such as restaurants, and what are we doing at OEC to support those workers as they come back into the workforce.

You know, during the pandemic, we were able to pay for childcare for frontline workers, you know, grocery workers, and give parents like a \$200 dollar a week subsidy, if you will. And that was a really big help to families. So, I think as we look at the stimulus package, we have to think about just what you're saying, and we are really open to ideas.

I think when you talked about the School Readiness Council improvements and breaking down the silos, all of those ideas came from a year and a half of listening to programs, to going out and meeting with councils, to calling up directors and saying, "What's not working?"

And I think the best way to leverage the new federal dollars will be the same thing, listening to how, creative ideas, cause we don't want this to be, "Well, we have these funds for two years, and then everything goes back." We can't go back. What was happening before in childcare was not sustainable. The system is crumbling. It doesn't work. And that's where the Governor's interested in. How do we use these new federal dollars that will be coming next? I think it's more than \$400 million to Connecticut. How do we use those over the course of two or three years to try to fix this broken market system?

REP. COMEY (102ND): Well, I think, that's great. Thank you. I think that I would love, you know, to see us move as a country and as a state towards poising ourselves towards

universal childcare, you know, across the board. So, is there anything that we can do to poise ourselves for that tier in the state?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Yeah. I am so glad you said that. Because I do think this Committee, and potentially the Human Services Committee, needs to be poised in case there is a universal childcare or universal pre-K proposal. Both are under consideration as part of the Biden Administration. Both have bipartisan support. This is not a Democrat or Republican issue.

And so, I met last week with Secretary Cardona and NAYC to talk about -- it's so funny how it comes back to this meeting. What we talked -- so what we've been meeting with Senator McCrory about, about whether you call it universal childcare or universal preschool, we really believe that a mixed model will work best because as you started by saying, "Families have a lot of different needs in terms of their schedule and flexibility and affordability." So it comes down to, what are the teacher credential? What are the standards? And how does this system work across human services and education?

I mean, we are really lucky to have an Office of Early Childhood, and I'm not just saying that cause I'm Commissioner, but I've watched as other states have tried to navigate during the pandemic. And we've had a real advantage having all the early childhood in one place, and having the dollars come to one agency. But this Committee is going to really need to think about that. And I think Connecticut has a good model. I'm just pointing out the Secretary Cardona in our school readiness. That's why we're trying to get these statutes fixed, so that if the dollars come, there are strong local councils to make recommendations about what's going to work in that community.

You know, in Hartford, for example, you know, they have enough preschool space as much fit because of so many magnet schools, and they want the kids in preschool to stay for good. So then, you know, so how do we let Hartford leverage what they're not using because of the large number of magnet schools for family childcare homes that may provide better extended day and more help for infants and toddlers? And part of our statutory change to allow for family childcare reimbursement is to allow for more of that flexibility and lower cost to families because then they have that as an option.

But our structuring Connecticut is that each community gets to think about what works here. Hartford's very different because of chef, than Danbury. You know, Danbury has really strong local collaborative that's working with the rest to have both a strong family childcare network, but also really strong preschools. But their needs are different. Their population's exploding, as is Stanford's, but other parts of the state is going down.

So I think we need to set up and have our School Readiness Councils in really good shape, so that when this comes, we're ready for public-private partnership. You know, we need to work with STE and OEC. And I think it's another really good reason that OEC's in the Education Committee, so that it has that ease of collaboration with the State Department of Ed. And then we also intersect with DSS for Care for Kids.

But, that was a long answer, but it's coming. I believe it's coming. And I wanted it for 30 years. I believe it's coming. And I think Connecticut's in a position to set itself up for a real parent-informed community-based locally-informed universal childcare/preschool.

As long as it's high quality, I don't care what you call it.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it. And I'd love to, you know, continue this conversation offline. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Representative. Robbie, who's up next?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We went over an hour, so we're going right into the public. And, we have Sarah Eagan, she's up next.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Well, before you go real quickly, and Commissioner, I have a quick, and can you give me a 30-second response?

COMMR. BETH BYE: Sure.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): How do we make sure those councils, those Governance councils, are reflective of the community in which they serve? Is there anything you can do from your bully pulpit? Or if there is a mechanism in place to make sure they are representative of the community in which they reside? And give me a 30 second --

COMMR. BETH BYE: You got it. 30 seconds. So this Bill is attempting to set that up, and it really gives us, once it's in the statute, it gives us the ability to then say to councils, "You're not meeting this. We're here with technical assistance and professional support and oversight." So that's the idea of this change.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Thank you. All right. And thank you for your [crosstalk] public -- Thank you. All right

COMMR. BETH BYE: Thanks. Hi, Sarah. Good luck.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I think we have, up next, Sarah Eagan, the Child Advocate. Sarah?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

SARAH EAGAN: Yes. Good afternoon -- Good morning to the Committee. My name is Sarah Eagan. I run the State's Office of the Child Advocate. I'm happy to be here this morning. For those that don't know, the statutory obligations of the OCA are to review, investigate, and make recommendations regarding how our publicly funded state and local systems meet the needs of vulnerable children.

I wanted to testify on a few Bills today, starting with, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING. A Bill, which the OCA, as others you have already heard from today, strongly support the Bill. The need for more school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, we are long overdue for meaningful investment in social, emotional learning that our children, and frankly our educators, need and deserve. As we know, many schools in Connecticut, including elementary schools, do not have access to school counselors, do not have comprehensive school counseling programs.

The inability to invest in needed supports for students and educators can contribute to terrible outcomes and waste. In September -- as I've testified before in this Committee, in September 2020, the Office of the Child Advocate published an investigative report regarding one urban school district's utilization of police in response to the crisis behavior of children in preschool through Grade 8 schools.



OCA found that the district called police almost 200 times in a six-month period of time during the 2018-19 school year, resulting in 36 arrests of students, including nine students age 11 and under. The Office of the Child Advocate found that children as young as 7, 8, and 9 years old were subject to a police response after exhibiting dysregulated and suicidal or self-harming behavior, with some children even handcuffed during these encounters.

OCA's review of the local police reports noted at least 40 incidents where children, often under ten years of age, spoke of dying or tried to harm themselves in school. None of the schools we reviewed had a dedicated social worker or counselor in the building. While that district is working to improve resources and supports for young children, we know that children across the state need us to invest in them and their well-being.

The use of law enforcement does not increase the likelihood of a child and their caregiver becoming well connected to needed supports. Teachers and other educational staff also need us to make sure that support staff is available to meet with individually with children, help connect families to needed resources, and offer supports and strategies to educators and administrators so they can best meet the needs of their students.

Wanted to testify in 6556, AN ACT ADDRESSING ISSUES CREATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT. I deeply appreciate the work of this Committee with multiple Bills, addressing urgent academic and developmental needs of children during and after the prolonged COVID crisis.

I wanted to offer a couple of additional suggestions to the Bill. One is assessments for children

with disabilities. As the state implements a framework for educational assessment and recovery, there must be a specific methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, for understanding the impact of COVID and learning loss for our most vulnerable learners, including those with significant disabilities who may not participate in traditional statewide assessments. Assessment data should also be published, dis-aggregated by district, race, ethnicity, and disability, and accompanied by specific enhanced support plans for school districts, as indicated.

Two, with regard to the Bill's provision, directing the STE to provide technical assistance to school districts on student engagement. OCA also recommends that technical assistance includes specific strategies for districts to identify and partner with community-based agencies who can assist with student and family outreach and help address barriers to student engagement that may be driven by family resource concerns, child and family support needs, children's mental health treatment needs, or other concerns.

This technical assistance should be urgently developed with the assistance of DCF, DSS, and community providers, and disseminated as soon as possible. Several blueprints developed by community experts during COVID-19 already exist. Federal stimulus and perhaps matching state dollars should be expressly allocated to support engagement and community-school partnerships. And technical assistance should emphasize sustainable funding strategies. For example, Medicaid and partnerships.

Number three, OCA calls special attention to the needs of our most vulnerable learners, young children who will transition or who have already transitioned from the state's birth to

three program to preschool special education services. As we know, early childhood is perhaps the most important developmental window in a child's life.

DALLAS EMERLE: [crosstalk] You don't mind summarizing?

SARAH EAGAN: Yes. During COVID 19, we know that most very young children receive their interventions remotely. OCA has recently reached out to state partners to discuss strategies that will provide children the support they need going forward for the early childhood education, special education population. I have additional recommendations specific to this Bill in our written testimony that I sent in this weekend, so I hope that folks have it. I can get it again to the Chairs if you don't. And the OCA is committed to continuing to work with our state partners on these issues.

Lastly, in our testimony on the Office of Early Childhood's Bills, we offer additional recommendations to the Committee about what steps can be taken now to address the urgent needs of infants born during the pandemic. Most importantly, the Connecticut average is usually about 3000 infant births a year. That's a lot of babies born during this pandemic with a lot of needs. And we do recommend that the Committee consider strategies to immediately improve and scale up families' access to home visiting so that every baby born in the State of Connecticut has access to at least two or three home visits, which is a highly recommended strategy for improving health and birth outcomes for very young children. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. Eagan. I think -- there you go, Doug.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm sorry, I was on mute. Thank you, Sarah, for your testimony, and we will open it up to any questions from the Committee.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So, I just have something, just -- it's just so disturbing to hear that police officers are called in for, you know, six and seven or eight year old children in a school system. It's just mind-boggling to me that they would even do that. And that's why it's so important that we look at, you know, providing consulates and social workers to local board of education. So, I thank you for your work on that. And that was just a comment. But we have a question from our Ranking Member Representative McCarty. Representative McCarty?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Yes. And welcome, Sarah, to the Education Committee hearing today. And thank you for the work that your office does. I'm just wondering, could you comment, I know part of the SEL proposal talks about more school community collaborations on the mental health side improvement. Can you -- does your office is that? Is your office associated with that? With that clear initiative?

SARAH EAGAN: Yes, Representative McCarty. That's it. So our office sits on the SEL collaborative as well, [inaudible] from our office participates. We have been a very, very strong proponent of that particular recommendation, and have been working with SDE and community providers on ways to scale up those kinds of partnerships across the state. We're not a community provider in that sense,

but as an advocacy office, we recognize the critical need for that.

And in fact, in our recent report, we did on the school police issue that I just reported on. That was one of the main recommendations we talked about. I think it's critical to have staff, internal staff available to schools and school districts to do some of this work. But helping school districts to have strategies for partnering with community-based agencies to assist with screening, case management wraparound is a very successful and cost-effective model.

And there are ways to pay for some of that, not just with state dollars, but with federal dollars as well. And I think there are initiatives in Connecticut that we have that we really need to look at how to scale up. And that's where some of our recommendations, we're making as well. I think match up with recommendations coming out of the SEL collaborative. And we're very hopeful that some of the federal stimulus dollars can be expressly allocated to help districts scale up those types of community-based partnerships, because schools can't do it all by themselves.

You know, and in the, for example, the Waterbury report, which we just referenced, I think one of the most striking things to me having reviewed every single police report of the associated with those 200 calls, was how many young children are coming to school with an immense amount of need. You know, when children seven, eight, nine, ten years old are coming into school, wanting to self-harm, talking about dying, we have a problem way beyond. How do we staff the school to respond to that? Because we have to get at the root cause of those problems for that child and offer help to that family. And I, so I deeply

appreciate that the SEL Bill both includes attention to screening and staffing, but also an emphasis on those community-based partnerships we're going to -- which are going to be an essential part of an effective response system.

And I think in the context of, COVID just one more thing I wanted to share, because there, you know, these issues just overlap with so many different Committees. And we have a children's mental health crisis right now in the State of Connecticut, as we know about. You know, data from last week, just on kids covered by Medicaid, tells us there were between 34 and 49 children stuck in state emergency rooms last week alone, awaiting intensive mental health treatment.

We had another apparent suicide of a child very recently, only 11 years old, in Connecticut. So these are, you know, we have to deal with this crisis right now. And so I just offer that data to the Committee, so you can improvise, I think, additional context and support for the urgent nature of the work that you're taking on, which we really, really appreciate. We need that. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your commentary. I just want to add, cause I don't want to pull along the debate that, you're absolutely right. This pandemic has taken a toll on our young people in a way that we have never seen before. And it's extremely important. It's extremely important that our school districts develop relationships with the organizations within their own community that have the know-how, the cultural competency, and have the respect of the community and the families to put the supports in place for our children.

School isn't -- school cannot do everything. I've been in Education for 30 years. We've been saying it, we've been hearing from teachers, we've been hearing it from administrators, "They cannot do everything." It is a much bigger issue around just school. But the supports in place with the proper support with the school in collaboration with district, I think we can move the needle. And I think that's what you're saying. And tell everyone that the school cannot do everything. And even if we add just a counselor or something, that's not going to be enough. It has to be a complete partnership with the community and the school if we want to be successful.

I'm going to stop right there. I know we have a whole lot of hands. People, colleagues, please ask her one question. And Sarah, can you really sum your responses up? Cause I want everyone to be able to hear, and I want everyone to be able to get their questionnaire. So we have three colleagues here. I believe Susan, Kim, and Anthony, and those are the three Representatives that have question for you. Please respond, and we'll move on from there. So I'm going to go with Susan first, followed by Kim, followed by Anthony.

SARAH EAGAN: You're muted, Representative.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And thank you for your testimony, Sarah. I just wanted to review with you quickly the transition periods between our early Birth-to-Three and moving into preschool. And then also the transitions from the moving out of a high school and into the community. If you could just go through the impact, COVID has had on those? And how we're doing in terms of [inaudible]?

SARAH EAGAN: So some of that was cut out, but I think I got most of it. So, as we outlined in our testimony, during COVID, most of the early -- majority of early intervention services to kids in Birth-to-Three have been delivered remotely. That may work for a lot of families whose children need a more modest or not with much support, but for kids with very intensive service needs, who are the most likely to transition to public special education preschool. They've gone a year without access to the type of services they would normally receive, and arguably the most critical developmental window that they have.

And as you and I have talked many times, and as this Committee has created task forces, and I'm thinking Representative McCarty's task force before on Birth-to-Three, we know we have a very, very inequitable access to early childhood special education around the state, and issue that our office has reported on and discussed multiple times. So what our recommendation is that the State Department of Education and helping the districts put together plans to use the federal stimulus dollars, make sure that local plans have express strategies to bolster early childhood special education, preschool supports, which will be needed now more than ever as children enter public school.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Hi, thank you, Mr. Chair. Nice to see you, Ms. Eagan. I wanted to ask you, in reading your testimony, and I recently visited a school, and I did get to meet an entire team, that included the school psychologist, the school counselor, a school therapist, and a school social worker. I wondered if you could shed some light on how



important is each of those roles? And is it essential that we look at an entire team coming in? Or are more one or two of these roles more important than another? And I also wonder if you could comment, in the context of my visit, all four of these folks that I met also felt that the SRO was part of their team in the study for Waterbury. Did they not include -- it doesn't sound like they had SROs there either. And I wondered if you could comment on that? Thank you, Ms. Eagan. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SARAH EAGAN: Yes. Thank you. You know, in the context of the school, the psychologist, the social worker, the counselor, all have different roles to play for the population. Some may have a larger role in testing. Usually, the psychologist has a larger role in testing and assessments. The social worker may be delivering mandated services pursuant to children's IEPs. In fact, in some schools, that takes up the majority -- and I'm sure educators on this Committee know even better than I. But a lot of times the hours that a school social worker, psychologist have in the school building are largely dedicated to children with IEPs who have mandated assessments and services.

And there's often a dearth of available hours, even whether a personnel that are partially or fully dedicated to the school for sort of generalized supports for children who may need the check-ins on a regular basis for holding lunch bunches, and other social skills support groups, doing crisis prevention, doing coaching and supervision in classrooms, providing strategies. Often that type of sort of prevention and response work is harder is where we don't have enough resources because the resources that are available are already being used.

And your question about the SRO. No, in Waterbury, there were no embedded SROs in those schools. Those are the younger children's schools. Those are roving SRO -- roving or roaming. Not sure what the right word is there. You know, who was going to those schools, right? That's something that I know Waterbury has recently redone their MOU with both EMPS, and I think they're doing some different things with their police department there as well.

But I think one of our most significant -- two of our most significant findings. There were one, there were no dedicated social workers in any of those schools. And two, despite the availability of mobile crisis services in the community 211, about more than half the schools called 911 more than they were calling 211. And that's, you know, something a lot of folks are looking at right now. Potentially even an increase in state funding for 211 mobile crisis services, a percentage of which is reimbursable to the state by insurance and Medicaid.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you [crosstalk].

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your response. Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to make a comment in regards to, the schools can't do everything. And I think that I would just want to say, I agree with that totally. And that's one of the biggest problems because when the school can't handle it, the next best person that they use to handle it is the police officer. And I'm saying that just because I know from experience that, as police officers, we tend to take on

everybody else's title when someone else can't solve the issue.

So it's really -- it's so important for us to be able to fund. If they're going to remove the police officers from the school, fund the needed positions for the schools. You just can't expect the schools to relate to the community organizations all the time. Though I do agree with that, but I think the school actually needs funded positions to take up the slack that the schools need to not always use the police officer for everything. Because, just the office presence is a part of the chain. It starts the arrest process. And until we either take them out or put somebody in there that is going to take up that slack, it's going to continue to be the same.

And as I said before, I was a school officer. I am not all for removing the school officers, but if we're going to remove the school officers, it's mandatory that we should be put in the -- in a statute somehow that would be mandatory that something is funded for that vacancy that it's going to make for the schools. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SARAH EAGAN: I really agree with that. And just one last data point on the Waterbury report is that, in those 200 reports, the vast majority of children who are the subject of the police response are children with known disabilities. And the children who were the most frequent subject, like three, four, even five times, were children with autism. So that tells us about, you know, that data is really important to inform, you know, even at that developmental age, you know, what would be needed to replace that.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Right. Thank you for your response. We have another hand just went up. Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have less of a question, and more of just a comment and a suggestion. When we have these conversations, and we come back to the elimination of SROs, those conversations seem to go very much one way. The experience I believe of most districts using SROs, if they've been properly set up, creates a mutual respect and a lifelong appreciation and mutual respect amongst our youngest and soon-to-be leaders of society and law enforcement.

So I don't want to take our eye for a moment off the fact that, what's needed is to augment the training. But also, I want to refer to the prior conversations and respect the observations of Representative Nolan because he hit it right on the head. In Waterbury schools, there are such funding issues that, you know, we consider social, emotional issues. And you know, in places that are underfunded and crisis situations, we consider those social, emotional issues to be luxury. They're not a luxury. They're part of what's needed for every student to be able to, you know, work out their emotional internal difficulties, their behavioral disabilities, whatever it is.

Representative Nolan was completely right. The police officer should not be the person that's called for intervention necessarily, unless -- well, rather than -- instead of postulating on circumstances, I want to just agree strongly that, you know, having a component of social, emotional support, a proper number of school counselors, and a nice developed new habit of referring this type of, you know, behavioral issue to social services instead of to 911, that's brilliant in and of itself.

So, you know, in Newtown, our SROs are so much more than cops. These are really people that are woven into this community, respected in this community. And they'd loved those kids. And they're willing to step out of their zone, step out of their own skin at times, and make emotional interventions. But those come from a greater level of engagement and dedication to our families and to our children. So, there is no doubt, no doubt that Rep. Nolan's cry for having emotional -- social, emotional type supports in our schools is dead on.

But, you know, I'll say this, I've said this several times, and I'll say it again. Taking the SROs out of schools, particularly in Newtown, over my dead body. It's just not going to happen. So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your commentary. I don't see any more hands. I will just say clearly, this is an issue that will -- I'm happy that we have a Bill that focuses on SEL. And that, SELs includes a lot of things. A lot of things that we heard today about counselors, about psychologists, about social workers, about school resource officers. We'll continue to have this conversation, but clearly the idea, all those things around counselors, social workers, psychologists, we all agree that we need those positions at school.

And in some cases, we know that SROs work very well with some school districts, and sometimes they can be traumatic for children in other school districts. We'll work through that, and we'll get to a solution that I think will be comfortable for everyone. So, with that being said, I want to thank you, Sarah, for your presentation. And we'll move on to the next

person on the list. And who would that be, Representative Sanchez?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Sarah. So we're moving back to public officials. You know, we'll go to public officials. And the next one up is the distinguished House Republican Leader Representative Candelora.

REP. CANDELORA (86TH): Thank you, Chairman Sanchez, and Chairman McCrory, Ranking Members, Berthel and McCarty. I'm here to testify in favor of two Bills, 977, and 6556. The House Republican Caucus had put a Bill in to address educational impacts with COVID. I think all four of our caucuses share the concerns that we have seen over the past year in our educational system.

I'm not going to read the testimony. We've submitted it. And I think that Senate Bill 977 touches on some important areas for virtual learning. I think as we move forward, it's important that the state provides sort of more guidance and input on how virtual learning should be done at the local level. And I just wanted to suggest some additions potentially to consider. When I hear from some of the administrators and teachers in districts, I come from a school district that opened up on September 8th and stayed open, but provided the opportunity to also to learn virtually as well. And maybe analyzing the impacts of providing options for our teachers, how they were able to navigate both.

I do hear from the educational community, not to provide options. It was too difficult for them. So, maybe having that legislation look at the impact of providing simultaneous educational options. Also, looking at the impacts that virtual learning has on our special education population, and how we move forward in educating them. If we ever need to

return to a virtual learning world, is there a platform that might be more successful for them? Or do we need to find an in-person model for our special education children, no matter what?

And also, just looking at, you know, the absenteeism, the impacts of it has it created sort of chronic absenteeism. The transitions from in-person to virtual learning the impacts on our children, we're seeing that the high anxiety levels, I think of transferring back and forth. And I think to that point is trying, and I think the Bill sort of touches on it. But touching on the issue of snow days.

You know, when snow days were canceled and replaced with virtual learning, I didn't see it as a big deal. But my wife being an early childhood educator, believes that it's important that the children have an opportunity to experience snow days. Our district was in person the entire time. So, you would thought when we had a snow day, we would have just canceled school, but they actually transitioned to virtual. So our district became virtual for snow days only, which was a little odd. So, I just think that, rather than checking the box and filling the requirement of the 180 days, that we look at a more unified standard, so we don't see this transition of back and forth for virtual learning. And if we do utilize virtual learning, providing a meaningful platform for it.

My final point is, I did have an individual who reached out to me whose children cannot be in-person due to medical conditions of COVID, and they're at high risk. And she also suggested, and I just want to bring this to the Committee's attention is, looking at providing a virtual learning platform for those children who may not be able to come back into the

school even next year. And there are programs out there that offer an exclusive virtual learning platform that could be appropriate for the couple of hundred children that might have to remain virtual because I think for teachers to try to do both at the same time, the children are missing out. So with that, I'm happy to answer any questions. And thank you for raising both of these Bills.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Minority Leader Candelora. Yes, I think the last part that you spoke about in regards to children that may be more vulnerable and not be able to go back into the classroom. We definitely have to look into that to see how we can accommodate that moving forward, definitely. I'm going to now my Ranking Member, Representative McCarty, who has question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome Minority Leader Candelora to the Education Committee. It's so good to see you today. I would just like to first recognize your great interest in improving virtual learning, and for all of the work that you have done to bring this proposal forward. It's, as we all know, the optimal learning platform is in-person learning, but we don't know where we will be going forward. I think it's incumbent upon us to have good virtual learning minimum standards. And so, I really appreciate your work in that regard.

And also bringing new recommendations that may have been overlooked in the language in this Bill, particularly what you just spoke about with the special ed students and their needs. So, I really appreciate that. I'm not sure if you were present earlier today when the Commissioner spoke about virtual learning. I think she also recognized the importance going forward, but she did make a comment about



professional development and offering flexibility to the districts.

Can you just comment whether you would be in agreement with looking across the board where the districts are, and then deciding whether to offer flexibility on the local level to determine what type of training and professional development is needed? So, just your personal comments in that regard and anything else you would like to add to this Bill. Thank you.

REP. CANDELORA (86TH): Sure. No, thank you for that question. I think generally it was something that we also wanted to see in the Bill, was that the training platform for our teachers. One of the things that we experienced in our town was, when we started out with the in-person platform, despite the fact that so many children going back to school, we did have a number of children that decided to stay home and learn from via distance learning. The work -- it doubled the workload, and probably tripled the workload for our teachers.

And so I think what we saw in a lot of schools did this was went to a half-day on Wednesdays just to give the teachers the ability to sort of transition back and forth from in-person learning to virtual learning. And I think that's an important to look at not just giving the school districts the flexibility to provide these platforms. But I think as we're putting together the metrics at the state level, recognizing that if we are going to have that type of a structure, that there is going to be more support needed for our teaching staff, because it's not easier just to go virtual.

I think, from what I hear, many teachers would prefer to be back in-person, and they're really

struggling with having to do both, which many districts are doing right now. And so, I think that this is an opportunity while it's still fresh in all of our minds. Hopefully, we don't have to see this type of platform again next year, but I think it's incumbent upon us to look at these issues while we're experiencing them. So if this ever happens again, we'll be much better off.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your response.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Minority Leader Candelora. And I know we will look forward to working with you as we move this proposal forward. And I thank you for the recommendations that you have made to make this Bill even better. Thank you so much.

REP. CANDELORA (86TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the circle, from the Committee Members?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, I think that's it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move on.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative.

REP. CANDELORA (86TH): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Steven Hernandez. There he is. Hi, Steve.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Hi, how are you? Good -- good morning. It's still morning.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes. [laughs]

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: It's so nice to see everyone. And we have submitted our testimony. Firstly,

Senator McCrorey, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, and of course, other esteemed Members of the Educational Committee. My name is Steven Hernandez, and I'm the Executive Director of the General Assembly's non-partisan commission on women, children, seniors, equity, and opportunity. I also happen to be the Co-Chair of the statewide collaborative on social, emotional learning for the State of Connecticut, which is a one among the first in the country to be formed by a state for a state in service of the several branches of government and outside of government. So I want to thank you for your vision in the last couple of years, not only in creating the collaborative, but also supporting it.

I'm going to focus my testimony today on two Bills, Senate Bill 977 on virtual learning, and House Bill 6557 on SEL. On the first Bill, the great thing about coming after my dear friend the Child Advocate, and others who have spoken before me is that I can really cut to the chase on my presentation. What we know is a pandemic has exacerbated disparities in educational opportunity in the state, particular for our most vulnerable populations. Children living in poverty in experiencing food and shelter, and security. Families in cramped conditions - living conditions. Parents, grandparents, and guardians are unable to assist with technology. Lack of access to technology or reliable internet. Families experiencing stress, grief, and other traumas, and children who are English language learners. These are families that have really been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

We note the stories of parents that we have heard being completely disconnected with their children's educators throughout some of the pandemic. Much has been asked of parents and guardians during the pandemic, and those that

were able to, were able to took on the mantle of responsibility necessary to ensure that their children continue to learn. This was hard enough for parents able to work from home, continue to provide for their families while managing a world turned upside down. But we need to know the silent sacrifices parents have made in the context of virtual learning to ensure that we are not just shifting the right to an education, to a burden accessible only to the privileged.

And really the focus that I would like for you to hone in on with the virtual learning Bill is those quiet corners of the state where so many of our children are lost. And that might be in rural Connecticut, where there is very little access to reliable internet. It may be in our cities where our children are learning in cramped environments, and they need this --

DALLAS EMERLE: [crosstalk] two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Yes. Thank you. And then finally, on the SEL Bill, I really would appreciate your questions on that. The SEL -- the work of SEL, some of you have noted, is not a nice to have. It is a critically important skill set. It is a developmental skill set. It's a way that we deal with long-term growth and learning. And your Bill really takes on the full spectrum of prevention and intervention in a time when we need it most. So I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Steven, for your testimony. We'll open the floor up to any questions from the Committee.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I just have a quick question, and then we have Representative McCarty, that

has a question as well. So Steve, earlier I asked this question to Commissioner in regards to, you know, social workers, counselors, psychologist. We all know the importance with -- due to this pandemic formed specifically, how many kids are going to have many social, emotional issues moving forward. And we're not talking about something that can be easily fixed within a year.

You know, we do have some funding coming in from the federal government. We can see that some local board events may, in fact, hire more counselors and social workers during this -- during that time that they have this extra funding. My biggest concern is, after this funding has dwindled down in '23 or '24 what's the next step? Because what's going to happen is that many of these local board events may not have the resources to keep counselors on. So, do you have any suggestions in regards to that?

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Thank you for that. There are two heavy lifts here. I think, that we have put off for a long, long time. The one heavy lift is to really invest on the front end of an infrastructure of supports in social, emotional skills building that should be accessible to every child, family, and community of the state.

Now, what that means is the professionals that you noted because those professionals each -- and Sarah Eagan said it perfectly. They each have a role in the day of the child and the beauty and the privilege of having the resources in your community, to have those roles available to the family, to the child, to the community, and to the learning environment is that, it helps level the playing field when it comes to access to information. And that -- whether that be information on relational skills, or one plus one is two, critically important.

What this pandemic has given us is two opportunities. One, to see the incredible need, where it may be concentrated, where it may be more diffused. But two, to take some of those federal resources and put the investment in now, and while we're doing that, figure out how to make them sustainable. Those two things have to, you know, we're at an incredible place because I think, you know, we have the ability now to see an immediate hindsight where the exact need is, and to see in our immediate future, the resources to kind of put all this stuff into action. So I appreciate the question.

There was a question earlier about the role of the SRO and how that fits in to this team, and the beauty of the nuance of your conversation as it unfolded around the issues of SROs, is that you really did capture the various parts of the state. There are places in the state, and school districts in the state where the SRO is a critical part of an overall fabric of success, overall fabric of opportunity for young people. The SRO, you know, I think it was Representative Bolinsky who said, the SRO has a very discrete role, and that's being a role model. It's being a person that's there as a resource for adults and for kids in a pro-social positive way.

But then we heard Representative Nolan talk about the SRO that is there to be the replacement for so many of the other things that we have not funded in our schools. A replacement for a school counselor, replacement for a school psychologist, a replacement for a disciplinary, and a replacement for kids who are hungry and secure and what that might mean for that child, housing insecure, what that might mean in their behavior, a replacement, we have set up those sorrows to fail.

And it's a huge disservice to the SRO who is put in this position and a disservice to the children and the families who then bear the brunt of that response. So I loved your answer, Senator McCrory, about how there is a nuance here. And the nuance should always be that the role of the role model, should be very clearly defined. Being a role model, being a mentor, is a sacred and solemn responsibility that, if you take it on, has to come with an infrastructure of support around it. So, thank you for the opportunity to talk about that.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Do we have any other questions? I see Representative McCarty.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And welcome, Steve, to the Education Committee. I just like to recognize all the great work that the task force has put in place with these social, emotional collaborative work. And if you -- and you have addressed some of the concerns. I know we talked about the ratios, which is really going to be the biggest challenge going forward. But could you just comment very briefly on why you believe social, emotional learning, and what the state department is doing in collaboration with the school districts, how that can impact school climate, and the genesis really for introducing social, emotional learning initiatives? So in an effort to create a positive school climate? And I just want to give you that opportunity cause I know you've worked so very hard on that. Thank you.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Thank you for that. As you know, I was formerly the Attorney for the Commission on Children. And when I first arrived in the

State of Connecticut, we really did focus on one slice -- one element of school climate, which is anti-bullying. And it makes sense because for so many of us, our entry into the work of social and emotional skills building is when there's a problem, is when a child has been bullied, a target of mean behavior. So that was the entry for a lot of us in this policy space.

The science has come so far when it comes to us fully understanding the importance of relational skills, not only in the context of teaching and learning, but also in the context of social, emotional development, more particularly. The work has evolved, and we must evolve. You know, some of you may think, why is it that we see every single year, we see another SEL Bill? That's because we're learning every single day, what it means.

Now, this last year has really highlighted the importance of social, emotional connectivity of being able to deal and respond to high-level traumas as they arrived. You know, we knew before this pandemic, that so many of our schools were inverted in terms of high-level traumas, being the law of the land. And someday, we'll get to the nice to haves of social, emotional skills, building an awareness.

We not know that we have to double down on that investment as well. Because if a child is stressed, if a child is experiencing loss, grief, all of the other things that children may experience together with their families, there is no room to understand how one plus one equals two, and why that even matters at the end of the day. So social, emotional learning this Bill is one of the pillars, the critical pillars I believe, of what you were doing the



session. And I think it really does track the science and best practices.

There's one section that I really love in this Bill, which is the cross-agency collaboration on a plan for social, emotional skills, building. It comports with our national efforts on a whole family approach, multi-generational approach to success. It understands that a child does not exist in the context of the four walls of the classroom, but this is a life cycle challenge and a life cycle opportunity to be productive, contributing for social members of society.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very -- oops, sorry.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm sorry. Go ahead.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): [crosstalk] Mr. Chairman. I just really wanted to thank you again. And I'm looking forward with the Education Committee to reviewing all of the recommendations. And this is, as you point out clearly, the time we need to move on social, emotional learning throughout the state. And I really thank you for all of your efforts, Steve, in this regard. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other hands up, Representative Sanchez? Seeing none. Again, Steven, thank you for your testimony. And we'll move right into our next presenter.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Let me see. I believe we have Senator Hwang. Senator Hwang? I don't see him. Okay. So let's -- I do see Erika Wieceński. Erika Wieceński? I hope I'm pronouncing your last name correctly.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): First Selectman, that's the First Selectman a Willington. She's not here. Okay, let's go to the next --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Saw her there a minute ago. I guess she must have gone off. But, okay. Okay, Representative Farrar. Is Representative Farrar? Don't see Representative Farrar either.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): So, Representative Sanchez, like we did last meeting, if these individuals come back, we're going to have to put them to the back of the line cause we have other people that are sitting here patiently waiting. So we're not going to deny other people opportunity to speak just because others didn't show up. So --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Let's move on.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So then, next is number 20, Julie Ausere from CABE. Yeah, she's there. I see her.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right.

JULIE AUSERE: Good afternoon, everybody. And to Chairman McCrory and Sanchez, and Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Julie Ausere, and I'm the Chair of the Canton Board of Education. And I want to thank you for allowing me to submit my testimony today.

I'm submitting testimony on behalf of myself as well as behalf of CABE, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education. And I am submitting testimony on Senate Bills, 976 and 977, as well as House Bills, 6556 and 6557. I'll start with the Senate Bills first, and I will try to

summarize and go as quickly as I can. And then I'm open to questions if I do not get to complete my testimony.

On Senate Bills 976, CABE, and I support the provisions of this Bill that would establish a task force to study issues related to the provision and funding of special education. CABE and I, as Chair of the Connecticut Board of Education, urge the legislature to remove the cap on the special education excess cost grant. This cap has increased the hardship on local districts, as the cost of special education continue to rise. Removal of the cap, restore the safety net available to districts, and for these extraordinary costs. And I can share statistics on my district if you would like to ask me that after my testimony.

On Senate Bill 977, CABE, supports the provisions of SB 977 that provides for review and provision in virtual learning. We want to ensure that the review includes identification of resources needed at the local level to effectively deliver instruction and to provide that this be a local option rather than a mandated system.

CABE, and I oppose the provisions in Section 5 and 6 of SB 977, which would add extensive professional development training. We believe professional development for virtual learning should be delivered on an as-needed basis if a local district plans to utilize a virtual learning model. An ongoing mandate requiring that all staff participate in such professional development utilize this precious professional development time that could be used to address greater needs of a district.

Moving on to House Bill 6556. CABE supports the provisions of this Bill, which required the development of learning loss and student

disengagement mitigation strategies, as well as providing resources and technical assistance to Boards of Education. We urge that the legislature ensure that the State Department of Education has sufficient staff to meet the requirements of this legislation.

And then House Bill 6557. We are committed to --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry, [crosstalk] two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

JULIE AUSERE: Thank you. We support realizing the needs of the whole child, and it's been interesting to hear testimony around this. I think the -- we have concerns with implementation, as many have voiced, and mandating ratios of staff at the local district level. This takes away the flexibility from local districts to assess the needs of its students and put into place the staff that it feels that are needed.

We also have concerns with mandating professional development to teachers on a social, emotional learning. And while that's important, we would urge that the legislator reconvene the task force and Committee that was formed several years ago, that looks at all mandated professional development. I know that the Representatives from CAFE, the teachers' unions, and CAPSS are anxious to continue the positive rework -- positive work that resulted from that legislation, and looking at removing some of the mandates and making room for some of this much-needed new professional development on SEL. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. And we'll take any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any questions from the circle? Well, I see one hand. Representative McCarty, did you have a hand?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I'm so sorry, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I would just like to question to see if CABE would be supportive if we look throughout the districts and we determine what level of the social, emotional level where the district falls, if CABE would support at that point, allowing the district to determine that they need more professional development in social, emotional learning and training? Because I think the mission for us and the Committee is to be sure that all districts are trained properly in social, emotional learning. So while we want to give flexibility, we also believe in the importance of professional development. So, could you just comment where CABE would fall on that?

JULIE AUSERE: Yeah, so I think, as, you know, I think the importance is that we give districts flexibility, but I think, as we -- as you go out and question the districts and find out what their needs are, that they will welcome the additional professional development on SEL. I know that in my district in Canton, that's something that we've been heavily focused on these last years. I think it's important to put rather than just adding on and adding on additional professional development.

It's important to put it into context of all the professional development that is mandated out there for teachers and staff, and making sure that we are prioritizing things and making room for this much needed professional development, and not just adding it on to things that could be put to the side maybe for the next year or so. Or even, professional development that can be delivered on an as-needed basis just to the staff within a district that needs specific professional development. And so I think that's where this, you know, the reconvening the task force really would help to take a look at all the mandates out there around

professional development, and help to  
prioritize what districts really need.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well, thank you for those  
comments. And if you may recall it, that has  
been truly an initiative of this Education  
Committee --

JULIE AUSERE: Absolutely.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): -- to try to exempt those  
professional development requirements that are  
not necessary so we can focus on and prioritize  
what is absolutely necessary statewide. So  
thank you for those additional comments. Thank  
you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other  
questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There are none.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move on.  
Thank you again for your testimony.

JULIE AUSERE: Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next, we have Fran  
Rabinowitz.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Good morning, everyone. Oh,  
sorry. It's now afternoon. It's great to see  
you all. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory,  
Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, and  
Representative McCarty, and all of the Members  
of the Education Committee. I just want to  
begin by thanking you for raising the Bills  
that you have brought forward, which -- I could  
have testified on everything today. I just  
think that you are hitting on the areas that  
are so important to Connecticut's students.

So, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I'm Fran Rabinowitz. And I'm the Executive Director for the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. I'm here on behalf of CAPSS to speak to Raised House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING. I want to begin by saying, I'm very fortunate to be part of the SEL collaborative. And I have learned so much from so many on that Committee in our meetings over the last couple of years.

As I'm sure you know, social and emotional learning is highly valued among educators across Connecticut. Our educators have been both creative and persistent in addressing our students' needs, even during this very difficult COVID time. And frankly, I heard Sarah Eagan talk about the needs of students during this COVID time. I hear it all the time. I hear it every day.

And we believe that social and emotional learning, and moving this forward, is absolutely non-negotiable. It is the foundation for academic growth. You cannot teach a child if that child is afraid or unsettled or in the midst of trauma. We have to address it. And it is so welcomed to me to finally hear educators across the state saying we have to address the needs of the whole child.

CAPSS recently published the blueprint to transform Connecticut schools. In it, we recommended "student wellbeing" as an area of focus. It called for a statewide network of support for social and emotional learning, and \$10 million dollars annually in new state grants to fund the substantial efforts necessary.

DALLAS EMERLE: [crosstalk] half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Okay. Including working with, what I heard you say, a more effective way with community networks, we need to be less siloed. We are thrilled that you're placing the priority on social, emotional learning. We will say that \$10 million dollars in funding is not nearly enough to establish the ratios that we know need to happen. And more importantly, I think, is to develop those community networks, and find a way to more seamlessly employ those networks within our schools. So, I thank you for working on this. And I'm here to answer any questions, or if you have any recommendations for me or for superintendents.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Fran.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Fran.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I do have a quick question. Do you have one, Doug? Are you going to --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No, no, go ahead.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. So, I'm glad you mentioned -- you talked -- you touched upon Section 21, which is about the \$10 million dollars that, you know, that's in the Bill for social, emotional learning program established. We know that \$10 million dollars is not --

FRAN RABINOWITZ: No, it's --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): It's like penny in the bucket. So, we have a lot of work ahead of us because we know that this is not going away. This is something we're going to have to deal with for years to come. And so I look forward to working with you at CAPSS and CABE, and everyone else to see how we can move forward with this, and how we can find the funding, especially. Because this is going to be so, so important moving forward.



FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you, Representative. And we stand ready to work with everyone as we move this forward. And I know that there's a huge influx right now of federal funding. I think it behooves us to find creative ways, especially with staffing and with community agencies, to find ways that are sustainable. I've, as former superintendent in Bridgeport and Hamden, I've been a part too often of grants coming in and then a funding cliff. And we need to do the best we can to do whatever is necessary to create sustainable programs across the state.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. And I think we have Representative McCarty has her hand up for a question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome, Superintendent.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much for your - - thank you. Thank you for your tremendous leadership on this SEL initiative and for all the work that CAPSS has done also in this regard, and for pointing it out in the CAPSS blueprint. Again, I think it's really important. Could you -- would you mind just commenting briefly on -- we've heard different opinions about whether or not professional development is needed in the districts, in this regard. What do you think is the best way that we could make that a priority and implement those necessary resources that should be there to help with professional development? That's number one.

And then before I forget, I would just like to recognize Superintendent Rabinowitz for agreeing on one of our other proposals on the

special ed proposal today. She didn't mention, but that she has graciously agreed to Chair that task force. So I just wanted to recognize her for all of her great work on so many areas. So, if you could just comment on the professional development piece? I think with your knowledge across the various districts, that would be helpful.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you, Representative McCarty. And I consider it a privilege, by the way, to be asked to Chair that special ed task force. We have a lot of work to do in that area. On social, emotional learning, let me just say to all of you, that it is non-negotiable that training must take place. I have been working in social, emotional learning for at least 12 years now. I've done it in -- I implemented in Hamden, and I implemented in Bridgeport. And there is no way that you can just put it in. It needs a careful thought and training.

I happen to use the RULER program out of Yale. But whatever program you put in, you're developing a culture within the district. In order to develop that culture, you have to train, you have to give strategies, and you have to listen to all of your staff as you move this forward. I think it is an incredibly good investment, affective, and absolutely necessary for our children.

And I, you know, personally, as I go out and work with superintendents now, I am going to recommend that they use some of these federal dollars. That's what I mean about sustainability. Use some of these federal dollars to do a training program for social, emotional learning. That will last beyond 2023 when the dollars go away. But let's have our teachers and our support and all of our school staff in a better place in terms of being able to meet our student needs. So, yes,

Representative, there is no way we can get away from not having that professional development.

And I want to say one more thing. We're very fortunate that the Dalio Foundation did fund a training program right now, statewide. We've trained more than 20,000 educators in the RULER program in strategies to better meet the needs of their students while they're remote and as they come back post-COVID. It's a real start in the right direction.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Superintendent --

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): -- for your insight and for working with the Education Committee on this very important proposal. Thank you so much. And thank you, Mr. --

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you all for your wonderful, wonderful work. I mean that.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We have, just be patient, there are couple more questions for you, Fran.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Sure.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Johnson, followed by Representative Welander.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And thank you so much, Fran, for your great testimony, and your work on these issues. One of the things that I wanted to have you maybe help me out with is the idea of the coordination of services with the social, emotional learning. Particularly, when we get to families that are homeless, or families that are experiencing domestic violence, families that have those kinds of problems, I would

suspect need more assistance. And I wonder what kind of process we could develop, or you have, a vision for, that would help us connect more with community services?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you, Representative. And let me just say to you that, in Bridgeport, I was lucky if I had one social worker for 600 students. If that was lucky, I did not have social workers or psychologists in every school. And I needed help at 10 o'clock in the morning when the kindergartener had a meltdown. And that meltdown could have been because they were traumatized, because they had experienced domestic violence, any of those things.

And I was working very hard with Bridgeport Prosper and United Way during my tenure there to find ways to seamlessly bring in the networks that existed in Bridgeport. In other words, I was more than willing to give up office space, et cetera, to work with staff, to assimilate networks in there. That requires a lot of work. And it requires us to not be territorial. It requires us to work in a fuller way to understand that, what you said earlier, we as a school system cannot do it all, and we will never have enough personnel to do it all. We have to depend on a wider network, you know, you've got the school-based health centers were incredibly helpful. You've got family resource centers. I mean, I can't say enough about them. If their work, if they are run well, they can provide that bridge with the community.

But I would say to you, I would do anything right now to work toward making that happen, because I also believe that something -- a process that's sustainable. But it means giving up territory -- giving up power, guys, and being able to work collaboratively outside of any kind of hierarchical structure.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you for your answer.  
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And I believe we  
have one more Representative. Representative  
Welander.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I  
hope my technology is working better now. I  
just wanted to ask -- hi, Fran.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Hi, how are you?

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Good. How are you?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Good. Thank you.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): I know that we are all  
especially concerned about the cost of  
implementing these increase in programs and  
staffing. And we're all looking, but schools  
are looking at that, especially right now  
because it is budget season. But I was  
wondering if you could let me know if it would  
be safe to say that, in an increased investment  
in this type of staffing and outreach and  
intervention -- tier-one type of interventions  
would have a long-term payoff down the road?  
If we would see that money returned to the  
state in treating things before they get to  
crisis levels?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: I couldn't agree more, Mary. I  
have to say that I do believe that intervening  
with these students with strategies that we  
give our teachers to intervene, would save us  
incredible amounts of money. I mean, it's in  
my mind that, if you do preschool, you save --  
for every dollar invested, you reap \$12.90  
dollars. Okay? I believe that you would see  
that kind of investment here.

I'll be honest with you, when I was in Bridgeport, I watched young boys of color being identified, left and right, for special ed. It killed me because I'm all for everyone getting any service they need, and if it's special, ed it's special ed. But I don't believe that all of these young children needed that. They needed intervention. They needed strategies prior to that identification. They needed help. And I did not have those kinds of resources to intervene with them when they needed that intervention. And I do believe we could save incredible amounts of money. And more important than saving the money, we can allow children to be far more successful at an early age. So thank you for raising that.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Thank you for your answer. I appreciate it very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. I think we have another hand up. Representative Felipe.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, hello, Superintendent.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Hello. Hello Representative.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): I just wanted to kind of piggyback off of Rep. Welander's question because you talked about intervention with our special education folks, and the over-identification of those folks in places like Bridgeport. But do you think that that is really an over-identification in terms of a number, or in terms of the students that are getting those services? Because I do know that people have told us about under-identification in terms of children having behavioral issues and maybe not being diagnosed, or not being given special ed treatment. Can you speak to it? Do you think there'd be a change in the

number of students, or just the student population in which we're helping?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Well, I think it would be a change in probably in the student population that we are helping, Representative. There are a couple of things I want to say here. Please do not misunderstand me. If a child needs special services, they need to get special services. But I'm going to step out on a limb here, and I'm going to say to you that, some of the special services that we offer, these children are not the best quality that they could be. It is not.

And maybe you'll take me off this task force when I start to say this, but I will say to you that, identify a child at kindergarten age and placing them in a self-contained class with six other children that have been identified with social, emotional learning problems and not having the ability to mainstream those kids, et cetera, to see positive behavior patterns, is an issue. We've got to do better. There's got to be better ways to do it. And I would agree with you a hundred percent. I watched the quiet children not being identified when they should've been identified.

So is there a problem with under-identification? Absolutely, as much as there's a problem with over-identification. But identification for what? And what are we -- what is our goal for these children? If they do come in with trauma, what's our goal? Do we believe that they are going to need special education for their whole career? Where are we going with them, and how do we best meet their needs? And I happen to believe that equipping our teachers with strategies to work with them first at the classroom level, is a promising practice, and moving it forward from there. Yes. So long

answer to your quick question. We under-identify as much as we over-identify.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you for that answer. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Seeing no more hands up, I'll just add to this last part of your testimony, Fran. I absolutely agree. There is an under-representation of children, and there is an over-representation, especially for young men, especially of young men of color, especially [crosstalk].

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Yup.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): And when we don't know how to service the academic side of their needs, we put them in special needs, or we labeled them with special education. And thinking that is going to help them get this supports that they need. And it's absolutely not true. There's two different things here. You have an academician -- many times, you have an academic concern. And really, the academic concern is, if a kid hasn't been taught how to properly learn how to read. A lot of these issues -- a lot of the fact that they have not been given the proper instruction on how to read, and then they continue to fall behind. They sit in classrooms, and they see themselves falling further and further behind. And then their behavioral issues come up, and then they're labeled at a very early age.

And we all know it's easy to get in, get labeled. It's hard to take that label off. And for a number of reasons. Sometimes just it could be financial because "some resources do cost" if you're labeled like that. But we got to get to a happy medium where we are providing the supports in place for the children academically and socially, emotionally. And sometimes, they



are intertwined. But we have to do that. And that's why this is the work of this taskforce. So I appreciate the work you guys are doing and continue that work. And we as a state, passing this legislation, to actually look at these things, is very important for us. So that's it for my commentary. We are going to move on to the next person.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you so much, Senator. Thank you. And thank you all for your really important work.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Who's up next, Representative Sanchez?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have on the list, Merrill Gay, number 22.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Merrill?

MERRILL GAY: Hey. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, Berthel and McCarty, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 6558. My name is Merrill Gay. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe, and ready for a lifelong success.

HB 6558 wraps together a number of things that we have supported for years, as well as a couple of new things. We urge you to support this Bill with two amendments. The fundamental problem in the early care and education system is that there isn't enough money in the system to provide adequate compensation to the staff who educate young children.

The amendments needed to this Bill are in Section 4, which deals with Care 4 Kids. So, in addition to making the subsidy available to more parents, language should be added to require that the Care 4 Kids subsidy program pay providers at the rate equivalent to the federally recommended 75th percentile of the market. And that's really important because parents on Care 4 Kids will have a certificate that's would be enable them to purchase care at 75% of the spaces.

As you may remember, we went from 2002 until 2019 with only one minor adjustment in the payment levels, which meant that inflation eroded the value of the certificate so that it only enabled you to access 7% of the preschool slots, and 4% of the infant-toddler slots. After the 2019 rate increase, that went up to the 25th percentile for preschool in the 50th percentile of infants and -- for infants and toddlers. But that means that parents with the Care 4 Kids certificate were still priced out of three-quarters of the preschool slots and half of the infant toddlers thoughts in the state.

The second section is part that we'd like to see amended is Section 7. And we think that the charge of the task force that is proposed should be changed or added to really look at how do we deliver a higher compensation levels to teachers who attain degrees. This change would also require some additional Members to the Committee to make it work. And I'd be happy to elaborate if people want to ask me questions about that.

The other -- I have a limited amount of time, so I would like to just point out that the other big changes that we'd like would be in, who is eligible for the Care 4 Kids program? And

again, happy to elaborate on that, cause I think my time is up.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Merrill. I do have some questions. Can you elaborate on the additional members that you were talking about in Section 7 of 6558?

MERRILL GAY: Sure. The task force, as it's proposed, is really about teacher certification, and the needs of the public school system. We think that there's clearly a need to have teacher prep programs that prepare early educators for the associate's and bachelor's degrees, and then later master's degrees if they're going to be teaching in the public schools.

But we've been talking about credentials -- degree credentials for early educators in the publicly subsidized system since 2005. And originally, everybody was supposed to have a BA by 2010. That has been kicked, pushed further and further out because we have not addressed the fact that people don't get a pay raise when they achieve those degrees. And it just doesn't work.

We have a system that is very fragmented. It is a small portion of the early education system that's in the public schools, a somewhat larger section that's in the sort of quasi-public subsidized system. And then, at least half of the early education takes place in private programs where there's no public subsidy. And they are all covered by the same accreditation bodies that encourages highly educated teachers. And you've got these different conflicting pressures that, the only way that a teacher who gets a bachelor's degree gets any real higher pay for this is if they go to the public school system.

And that means that the community early care system is essentially turning teachers. That's not good for kids. It's not good for programs. And it's just, it's a system that's not working. We need to figure out how do we get more money into the system so that programs can compensate staff at an adequate level. And there are other states that have done that. If we're going to have a task force to look at credentials, we also need to have a part that looks really at how do we compensate teachers.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Can you give us an example of the compensation differences between a person in a nonprofit organization and a public school system? What is the gap?

MERRILL GAY: So, public school teachers start at about \$45,000 and, you know, go up from there. In the community preschools they -- that are subsidized through the school readiness and CDC programs, they are usually trying to provide their staff with benefits and trying to pay as much as they can. But that's still in a sort of a minimum wage up to about maybe \$17, \$18 dollars an hour. And in some of the places that have done some fundraising to be able to augment salaries.

And in the private programs, there are many that are paying very close to minimum wage, and can't offer their employees benefits because their only revenue source are what parents can afford to pay. So, even within that private pay world, it's almost different worlds, if you're looking at programs in Simsbury or Avon versus programs in a low-income community.

You know, you heard from Commissioner Bye today that there are many family childcare providers who understand that their parents who are on Care 4 Kids, can't even afford the parent fee because they're making decisions about whether or not

they can keep the lights on. And so, you've got those family childcare providers, some of whom are not even collecting the full amount that they should get from Care 4 Kids because they're not getting the parent fee.

It's the market is broken, and that this is really a public good that we try to pay for as if it's a private service. And we have many families who can't afford the cost of care. And we have a childcare subsidy system that leaves a lot of people out. And so, you know, if somebody -- I would like to elaborate more on that Care 4 Kids piece of it.

But as far as the task force, I think that it's really important that we have some folks who understand the various different realities of the different components of the childcare system, so that there really should be a private unsubsidized childcare provider on there. There should be somebody from one of the subsidized programs. And it really needs to look at how have some of the other states addressed this issue of trying to raise compensation across the field, regardless of what the funding stream is.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Absolutely. And, you know, that's -- this has been one of my fights up here at the Capitol since I've been up here since 2011. Being a former preschool teacher myself, I know how, when we compensate these individuals. It is just terrible that we continue at this rate. And you mentioned, we've been talking about this since 2005, and here we are 2021, and we're still there. It just makes no sense.

The other thing too, that this -- the majority of teachers in this field happened to be female. And it's sad that they're paid at that rate. It's unimaginable. And I can't understand why.

I mean, I understand we need the funding, but there's got to be a time where we put our foot down and say, "Hey, enough is enough. We've got to do something to save this industry." And we're just not doing enough. And I hope that this year we can do enough.

And you brought up about the 75% percentile when it came to Care 4 Kids. You know, we know that that's so important because that'll bring in some extra income to these providers as well, which is crucial. With that, and this will be my last question. With the 75%, what amount -- what estimated amount are you looking at that we would have to include in the budget in order to make that happen?

MERRILL GAY: So, the changes in percentile are -- to know that, I'd have to know the raw data in the market rate study. So I think that's a question to ask OEC because they contract United Way to do that market rates study, and they should be able to tell you that. It's not something that I've got the data to be able to answer it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. Thank you. We have a hand raised. Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And thank you so much for your testimony today, Merrill. I just wanted to ask you. I had proposed legislation in the past that would provide in our Alliance District's early college opportunity to high school students so that they could receive college credit for free. And get an associate's degree if they had responded properly, so that they would be able to do early childhood teaching along with that. Because I see those as the two main things that the state needs. We need to provide education for the childcare providers and get them the opportunity to get that

associate's degree here, and also, we need to use STEM. And I just want you to give an opinion about that. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

MERRILL GAY: So, early college education in high school is something that I clearly support wearing my other hat as a board of ed president, and is something that I know that our district has explored. The real question is, what is it that draws people into a field? Why do you choose early education versus advanced manufacturing or nursing? You know, some of that has to do with your own interests, as you know that I like working with kids versus, you know, working with machines. But part of what goes into the calculation about what do I want to spend a couple of years studying in college is, how much am I going to earn when I get out? And so, it is great.

The scholarship program that we see has that helps teachers pay for the cost of classes. But fundamentally, it gets down to, what is going to keep people in the field, if you can leave and go down the street to Costco and earn a couple bucks more an hour than you were working in an early childhood classroom.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any other questions, Robbie?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any other hands.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. Again, Merrill, thank you for your testimony. And who's up next?

MERRILL GAY: Got to submit extensive testimony on all of the various components, that should answer questions. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, I'll be reaching out. Thank you, Merrill. Representative Farrar has been in the waiting room. We're going to have her next, and then we'll go -- right after Representative Farrar, we'll have Martha Chouinard. Representative Farrar.

REP. FARRAR (20TH): Thank you, Chairman. Thank you so much for accommodating all of us as we navigate our virtual lives. It's great to see you and fellow Chair McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee. It's actually great timing to follow Merrill Gay today because, I am testifying in support of House Bill 6558, AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SERVICES.

And I'm testifying on this today because in this crisis, women, especially women of color in our communities, especially in my own district of the 20th district, are facing tremendous challenges. There actually was a report that came out about a month ago that really highlights the disproportionate impact. It's called Essential Equity, and it highlights that nationally four times more females have left the workforce than males. And women have not only filed more unemployment claims than men, but 75% of those claims have been filed by females without a college degree.

And we know even in the last month with the latest work information that -- work data that came out of the federal government on unemployment is that, unemployment rates are disproportionately high in February for Black women and Latinas, at 8.9% and 8.5%, respectively. But this unemployment rate actually is in the double digits, if you count women, who've been -- who've left the labor force, not just being unemployed.



So the section that I think is so critical of House Bill 6558, that I wanted to highlight, really is Section 4. Because it puts into action, one of the ways that we can prioritize as a state solutions for women. Our state cannot get back to work if women cannot get back to work. And women cannot get back to work, unless there are true opportunities for affordable childcare and the childcare support necessary to complete education and training.

So Section 4 opens eligibility for the Care 4 Kids childcare subsidy, and this eligibility will include parents in the Even Start program or other adult education programs, parents in job training programs, parents enrolled in post-secondary education programs. And it would also provide a half-time childcare certificate for 90 days to help unemployed parents seek employment.

And childcare, we know from all the data, can be easily the family's largest expense. And when children receive this high-quality, consistent care, their parents, they can participate fully in whatever they're pursuing, be it English, language learning, be it GED completion, job training, or college classes. And right now, our state is one of only two states in the country that makes no provision for childcare subsidies for parents in job training or school.

So, it really is a moment. I know for all of us as colleagues, to look closely at what we prioritize. But our state can lead a recovery that focuses on fairness and equity. We can advance policy that close the gender and racial gaps. And these pathways are only possible with the availability of childcare and the wraparound supports, including transportation, healthcare, and affordable housing.

It is International Women's Day, and I hope that on this day, we can celebrate it by taking concrete actions, such as this Bill does, that will improve our lives, our economic security, and in turn, our state. So thank you to the Chairs and all the Committee Members to speak about this Bill today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. It is so important that we focus on Care 4 Kids and expanding that. Cause I have talked to numerous individuals here in my city that have not been able to go back to work because of childcare. They can't afford childcare. Even with some of them having Care 4 Kids certificate, they can't afford their payment, their portion of it, at this point. And many have lost their jobs. And it's so important that we, at least this year, focus on this in order to expand it. I don't see any other hands up. So, thank you so much, Representative, for your testimony today.

REP. FARRAR (20TH): Thank you all. Yeah, I'll see you soon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next up, I don't see Ms. Martha Chouinard, I guess, I'm going to go then to -- I do see Ann Smith. Ann Smith, you're up.

ANN SMITH: Thank you so much to Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee. I'm Ann Smith. I'm the Executive Director of AFCAMP Advocacy for Children. For 20 years, we've been serving the community and helping to provide resources for families of children with disabilities, especially those who are from low-income communities with a majority of residents who are people of color. I also am very pleased to have an opportunity to try chair our Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan

Implementation Advisory Board, and to be a member of our social, emotional learning collaborative.

I'm here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 976, Section 1. Section 1, to the extent that it is addressing needs for special education. But I know I have a limited amount of time. And I have a lot of things I want to get through. So, I'm going to just try to focus on how objection to task force, Section No. 2. And that, any task force, and I'm not sure that we need yet another one to study this topic, but this task force needs to be equitable in its membership. And as it's currently proposed, that has out of 14 members, only three that represent our families of children with disabilities.

And, you know, I would have to say with all due respect to Fran Rabinowitz, that having just a Chair who is representing only superintendents, but not having an opportunity for there to be representation in leadership and full participation by those families who consume those services, and have an active voice in leadership. That actually goes contrary to what we're doing as a state, then trying to build a dual capacity model, and trying to build family and community engagement. So we would have to be an opposition to taskforce as it is described in Section 2.

I'm also here to testify in support of House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING. And I'm going to take a page from my colleagues that preceded me on both Sarah Eagan and Steve Hernandez, because they have spoken outwardly about most of the points that I would also be expecting to address --

DALLAS EMERLE: Ann, you're at two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing. Thank you.

ANN SMITH: And so I would be saying that, we would want to make sure that we are taking this opportunity to make sure that we remove any barriers that exist to maximizing our existing resources, especially community providers and neighborhood providers who could assist our schools in supporting social, emotional learning. And that we would also be looking for opportunities to include families and communities, because schools alone, as we have heard from many today, cannot do it alone. But there are natural supports and resilience in our communities and our families that we're not taking advantage of.

I would say also, that to the extent that we are trying to make sure we're leveraging all of our state resources, we would want to make sure that we are taking every opportunity to encourage cross-agency collaboration. This is one of the pillars of recommendations that are coming from our children's behavioral health plan. We have 12 state agencies that touch our children's education and build behavioral health systems, and we need to make sure that they are working in close alignment so that the resources that we do have are used to the best advantage.

And that we petition Connecticut to be able to leverage any federal and private dollars that might also be brought to bear on the issues that are addressing our children and families today. And I'm happy to answer any questions around those issues. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Smith. Just a quick question. You mentioned Section 2 of SB 976. What would be your

recommendation? Who else would you add to that on taskforce?

ANN SMITH: Well, thank you for the question. I would actually be wanting to make sure that we had a more representative number of families whose children have disabilities. And then, I would also be making a recommendation that the Committee consider putting forth a co-leadership model. One which gives authentic leadership and authentic voice to the concerns of the children and families, or who are going to be impacted. The Committee as currently proposed is -- it's undemocratic, and that it is very much on the side of the school districts and their personal administrators. So there's no equity there in terms of the power distribution.

I did hear something that if we really want to make progress, we're going to have to work towards giving up power. This is one of those situations where, we came from the very outset, redistribute power, so that it is shared amongst those who are impacted by the policies that are made, and not only by policymakers.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. I do have a hand raised. Representative McCarthy.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I was going to ask the same question that you pose. But I'd just like to clarify for Ann sake that, please don't construe the makeup of the task forces, anything other than trying to put a task force back in place. And I certainly do appreciate your comments, and I'm sure as the Committee moves forward, we're going to take them under consideration because we do want a very well-balanced task force that has representation from the families and everyone. So, I do appreciate. But I just wanted to clarify that there was no intention

to slide anyone on the task force. So thank you for your recommendations, Ann.

ANN SMITH: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

ANN SMITH: And thank you for your work as well, Representative McCarty, because we've seen you at a number of tables where you have voiced your interest and your concern for making sure that we have the best representation that we can. And so that we can do the best for our Connecticut children and families.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I have a quick question for you here. And I'm sorry, I just caught the last part of your testimony. You said something about making sure there's equity within the task force. Can you give me a 30-second overview cause I didn't hear the beginning of it? What would you like to see happen with the task force, or the demographics of the task force that's being created? Can you give me a 30-second answer?

ANN SMITH: 30 seconds, really quickly, I would like to see this task force include equitable representation from the children who have -- whose families are those with disabilities. And I would like to see a co-leadership model that will give an opportunity for authentic representation and leadership from the voice that will speak for those who are not usually able to speak at those tables when decisions are made that impact them.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for your answer. Not seeing any more hands up. We'll go on to the next presenter. Thank you again, Ann.

ANN SMITH: Thank you for this opportunity.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next, I have on the list, Stephen Hegedus. Hope I'm saying that right. Sorry, if I haven't. Hegedus or Hegedus?

DR. STEPHEN HEGEDES: Hegedus.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hegedus. Okay.

DR. STEPHEN HEGEDES: Can you hear --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You're on.

DR. STEPHEN HEGEDES: Thank you. Can you hear me well?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

DR. STEPHEN HEGEDES: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarthy, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. Thank you today for the opportunity to provide comments to this Committee in support of HB 6558, AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT.

My name is Dr. Stephen Hegedus. I'm the Dean of the College of Education at Southern Connecticut State University. the current President of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Ed AACTE Connecticut, which is a group of 14 Connecticut public and private universities and colleges. And I also co-chair with Dr. Paige Bray from the University of Hartford, the Connecticut Consortium for the Advancement of Early Childhood Educators, which include members of

AACTE Connecticut, universities, community colleges, and community partners.

I'm here today to strongly support House Bill number 6558, particularly Section No. 7, which would establish a Taskforce that represents key stakeholders in the workforce preparation, and the systems that oversee the Early Childhood workforce. The ultimate goal would be to systemically overcome the inequities that we see in our Early Childhood Education sector from birth through age eight, between daycare centers, Early Childhood Centers, pre-K, K-school settings.

It should be noted that multiple Members of the Connecticut higher Ed sector, state agencies, community groups already meet regularly to work on such reform matters, and we strongly encourage the Committee to consider approving this Bill, because many of the partnerships are already in place. Ultimately, a new license for all, that is affordable, that is accessible, and that is achievable at work will provide a professional continuum for all involved in Early Childhood. For assistants, for lead teachers, generalists, specialists, early interventionist, mental health experts, integrated Special Ed, rehabilitation therapists, and ultimately addressed the workforce demands in the state related to the need for Early Childhood Educators providing childcare services for infants and toddlers through to age eight.

This will need us all to take a serious look at our present Educator Preparation Regulations, and structures presently in place, it will need investment to balance pay disparities, and increase



DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, Stephen you're at two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: It will take time, effort, and mutual collaboration among multiple partners, including those most affected at this time. Please feel free to reach out to myself or Dr. Paige Bray for further information and evidence. And I thank you, once again for having the opportunity to testify today to this Committee.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Do you have any question?  
Bobby,

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): we have representative Comey.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Comey, you're up.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Thank you. Dr. Hegedus. My question for you -- I just actually have two questions, but I'll phrase them probably in the order, you're going to want to answer them. But the first one is, we discussed the inequities in care, and you mentioned inequities in care, and that creating a licensure where it's affordable to get, it's accessible and achievable for students is certainly an important point. My question is really regarding our salaries of our Early Childhood provider that \$26,000 a year. Who of your students is going to want to, (a) go into that field where they invest -- they get a degree a four-year degree and, and get paid \$26,000 a year. And you mentioned at the tail end, before your time ran out, that it would take investments. And I'm wondering what investments you see if that is the answer, what investments you see as an important piece of raising the salaries of childcare providers.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Yeah, thank you very much for both your questions, and I think they are connected. And as I said, this really needs a systemic reform and it would involve lots of people. You're absolutely right. We've seen our enrollments drop because of that disparity in pay. Why spend four years? But we would want to hopefully look at ways, multiple ways to make it affordable. And again, when I said investment, that can come in forms of scholarships, fundraising, appropriated funds. And I know that the Office of Early Childhood, we heard Commissioner Bye this morning, we've been working closely with her and her staff who have been examining this exact topic and looking at ways to address those inequities. I believe it will take some time. And then, you know, again with having multiple people at the table, we can make recommendations for changes in policy that that we believe is required at this time. So I don't know if I've addressed specifically each question, but I see the two join together. That it will -- it will need it will need multiple solutions from my perspective.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Haven't -- I'm sorry.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm sorry, go ahead. Go ahead, Representative.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Haven't we had a Taskforce? I mean, we were talking about this, as Merrill said, since 2005, and I did see some testimony, which will be coming up after number 27 from Karen Rainville from the NAYAK and I read her testimony. And it seems as though we've been talking about this for a long time. And I'm wondering if having this discussion about licensing more people, which is -- are we

putting still putting the cart before the horse and that sense, do you think? [inaudible] real progress.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: So yeah, I have -- this is my seventh year in Connecticut. I was in Massachusetts before, at the University of Massachusetts. And one of the things that I've seen here, and I've seen changes of just in the past year is we need to open up our regulations, statutes, and teacher preparation regulations, which have been untouched since 1998. And that has -- that has become problematic. And certainly in conversations, with Senator McCrory and Rep. Sanchez. I think they're both in agreement with the position that we need to open up the books. And that that has been one of the major challenges that has -- what I'm saying about systemic reform and policy change that we need to address.

Without those changes -- and it isn't just in Early Childhood, it does -- it does impact a lot of what we do across the birth through 12 spectrum. That has held back I think, a lot of the recommendations that have been made by previous Taskforces. And I feel confident, because of the support we're getting from both the State Department of Education, and also the Office of Early Childhood, that having those agencies in support, we put forward a large proposal of over \$2 million, which also did include some private funds, we put that together as the consortium that I mentioned, we found out in January, didn't get funded. But within that we both had a letter from -- at the time Commissioner Cardona and Commissioner Bye which I had not seen up until that point in time to have those two agencies in support, ready to -- ready to address some of the regulatory restrictions that we have. So I think that's -- that's a big difference from my perspective.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Thank you. Thank you Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you, Steve. And I agree 100% we -- this is a perfect time for us to look at Regs review for everything from pre-K education, Early Childhood all the way up to K-12 level. Like you said, since '98, we have not changed. I mean, that's almost 20 some odd years ago, education has changed. We know that if we don't know, we realized it last year, during the pandemic, we really got to think about how we prepare our pre-service teachers. And I think that's something we will do this particular year. So thank you, guys.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Thank you. Yeah, we have students who weren't born then.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Exactly.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Yeah. Thank you, for the opportunity.

REP. SANCHEZ: I just wanted to touch up real quick on what Representative Comey alluded to in regards to the compensation. I think that we really need to focus this year on, at least bringing up that compensation scale for the teachers that are there now. Yeah. And then moving forward with the task for seeing what regulations we can dismiss and how we can, you know, move forward when it comes to different steps of educating. But right now we really have to look at the compensation portion or we're just going to continuous - continuously lose staff in that field.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Oh yes, absolutely.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm going to say It's approximately one o'clock we have 100 more into

individuals that's willing to participate. I'm going to ask us again to be mindful of our comments. One question, and, and I'm going to take the liberty of stop talking as much as I am. So, who's up first, who's up next? And remember colleagues, we have 100 more individuals ready to -- to present.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, next we have Paige Bray. And then after Paige is Nadiha Lindsey.

PAIGE BRAY: Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

PAIGE BRAY: Wonderful. Greetings to Chairs, McCrory and Sanchez and esteemed Members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Paige Bray. And I've been an Early Childhood Educator and an advocate for children and families for over three decades. My current roles include Associate Professor of Early Childhood and Director of the Center for Montessori Studies at the University of Hartford, the Co-Chair of ECHEC, which brings together all the Early Childhood faculty in the state of Connecticut. I'm a community-gauged scholar and a national Commissioner for NAEYC. I want to offer my strong support of House Bill 6558. In particular, I want to represent my role as Co-Chair of the CT Consortium for advancement of Early Childhood Educators. With the tax credit, the student loan forgiveness, and Section 7 establishing the Taskforce House Bill 6558, places compensation as a distinguishing factor of systemic change at this critical moment in our collective histories. We see it happening today that even essential minimum wage increases, not educational degrees are causing strain on the Early Childcare System and industry with no revenue to pay those increases.

I specifically want to support that the Taskforce is prioritizing equity-based practices through inclusive and representation of the Early Childhood workforce. This is an education Bill. But this is not just about Higher Education. Rather, it's about Early Childhood, which is a workforce that is complex, and includes public and private providers who have harmed children at birth to eight and families across all settings, family care, home visits, community centers, imbedded industry, and of course, our public schools. We need all of us to contribute to move this work forward. I want to say that the Taskforce representation is incredibly important. And I think it's not only important that it's represented by Representative stakeholder groups like the CT Consortium for the advancement of Early Childhood, like CTAEYC, like the CT Alliance, but also by individuals that reflect the national synergies that are happening right now.

Most importantly, I want to make sure to underscore that the Taskforce deliverables relate to competencies and compensation, those are linked. The use of the competencies as a frame to understand quality helps -- already Connecticut educated people work in the neighboring states, which we've already heard today, and that the competency frame would be a critical outcome for line 314 of offering levels.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry ma'am, you're two minutes 30 seconds, if you don't mind summarizing. Thank you,

PAIGE BRAY: I have 20 seconds left, no problem. What's key is that we define the levels of competency and compensation. If we're going to continue to have regulation in Early Childhood, we need to define quality through the use of

competency. I thank you for the two-year timeframe to think about how the task force can add to leveling credentials and basing those on competencies. Please feel free to reach out to me or Dean Hegedus if you have any follow up questions. And I did submit more specific written testimony.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank You Paige, and thank you for the work you're doing. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move to the next presenter. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next person is Karen Rainville. Is Karen Rainville there?

KAREN RAINVILLE: I am.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You are I don't see you.

KAREN RAINVILLE: I am here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Oh, I see you now. Okay, go on, you're next.

KAREN RAINVILLE: Thank you. Good afternoon, Members of the Education Committee. My name is Karen Rainville. And I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children and I live in Meriden, Connecticut.

On behalf of our nearly 1100 Early Childhood Education professionals across the state that make up our Membership, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 6558. There are several sections of the Bill that our or our organization supports. Specifically, the provisions for student loan

forgiveness and refundable tax credits for  
Early Childhood teachers.

As you know, and as you've heard today, Early Childhood teachers are some of the lowest paid professionals in our state. I've included with my written testimony a full Connecticut Fact Sheet on Early Childhood that you certainly can look at to reference some of these numbers. In Connecticut, the average Early Childhood teacher salary is just over \$26,000 with a federal poverty level of \$26,500 for a family of four. That means that 53% of our Early Childhood teachers nationally and 14% in Connecticut are educating our youngest children, yet limiting in poverty themselves. With this in mind, we have strong reservations about the Section of the Bill establishing a task force -- Taskforce, this Taskforce to analyze and make recommendations concerning Early Childhood Educator compensation, credentialing and competencies through relevant equity-based practices, degree programs and alternate pathways that meet workforce development needs in Early Care and Education sectors.

I've been working in Early Childhood in Connecticut for more than 30 years. I testified in support of the original school readiness language in 1997. I know Merrill referenced 2005 but I started before him, I believe. This was the first piece of legislation that spoke to requirements of credentials and degrees for Early Childhood teachers. At that point, it was CDA credential. I testified again in 2005 when public - now Public Act, 05-245 was passed, requiring teachers with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood in every school readiness classroom by 2015. Again, in 2006-2007, there was an Ad Hoc Committee formed that became known as the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium, which worked to frame out



details regarding a new credential. Again in 2008 and 2009 the Workforce subcommittee of the Early Childhood Cabinet developed a framework introducing the idea of Early Childhood teacher credential. Subsequent language in 2017 and 2019 made additional changes to timeline for degree attainment for Early Childhood teachers. Every piece of legislation since 1997--

DALLAS EMERLE: I'm sorry Karen, you're two-and-a-half minutes. If you don't mind summarizing.

KAREN RAINVILLE: Yep, has made changes to education requirements, in expectation that these changes will lead to highly qualified teachers and increased compensation. Yet, here we are 2021 and yet not one thing has been done to address the appalling low wages of Early Childhood teachers. We have all - all we have succeeded in doing is putting higher expectations on an undervalued and underpaid workforce. So I sit here before you today, asking that you look at Public Act 1961 from 2019, which required the office Early Childhood develop a plan for Early Childhood compensation, based on experience and degree attainment, pull up plans, review it, update it, but please do not put together yet another group that will place unfounded requirements on this profession. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. And my agency looks forward to continuing this conversation.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25): No, I don't see any.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move right on to the next presenter. Again--

REP. SANCHEZ (25): John Cattelan.

JOHN CATTELAN: John Cattelan here. Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, and Senator Berthel. Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is John Cattelan. I represent the Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs.

The Alliance represents 28 YMCAs across the state of Connecticut. The Alliance supports House Bill 6558 and 6559. Specifically, I wanted to address House Bill 6559. We support Section 9b of the proposed Bill. The Section of the Bill requires background checks for Camp Counselors who are over 18 that work from licensed camps, as opposed to background check legislation introduced some past years. We strongly agree with not implementing fingerprinting as a requirement to complete a background check, because it simply takes eight weeks for a fingerprint check to clear.

However, we do raise one concern, we respectfully request a provision of language that waives or modifies this requirement for International Camp Counselors our wise contract with a third party vendor who interviews and hire staff before they arrived in this country. And during this process they are personally interviewed and must provide references. The third party company then works with each potential counselor to begin the process of having their embassy issue a J1 visa. The counselors need to provide the Background Check information listed above in order to receive a visa at this from their embassy. With the limited resources our camps are currently facing, we do not -- we do not want to invest assets in a process that will not result in any findings. Thank you. And I would see if there's any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, John. I don't see any hands up at the moment. So

we're going to move on. Thank you, John for your testimony.

JOHN CATTELAN: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Elizabeth Fraser.

ELIZABETH FRASER: All set. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and Members of the Education Committee. I'm Liz Fraser, the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. And thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6558, which addresses the issues around affordability, accessibility, and the cost of quality, which have plagued the Early Care and education industry over many years.

While the pandemic didn't cause the underlying funding issues around our system, it certainly has exacerbated, exacerbated them. The Office of Early Childhood has done everything possible to work with child care to keep the system alive. However, sometimes with crisis comes opportunity. And with the passage of American Rescue Act, Connecticut will be receiving a substantial amount of money over two years in Child Care Relief, giving us the ability to act on the proposals in House Bill 6558 and begin to address the viability of the Early Care System. My full testimony has been submitted, my time today I'm just going to say a word about the need to extend Care 4 for Kids coverage to parents needing additional education and training, especially Adult Ed programs.

Connecticut is one of only two states that does not allow eligibility for Care 4 Kids outreach, for education and training. This has left a gap in workforce development with little opportunity

for parents with children to get the long term career pathway training needed to gain supportable employment. Pre-pandemic -- sorry, pre-pandemic, 20% of children in Connecticut, were living in a home where no parent had full time year round employment. This figure includes 38% of black children 38% of brown children and 16% of white children.

We need to ensure that all parents have equitable access to opportunity offered through education and training, leading to supportable employment and reverse this trend. And for many families, this includes accessible childcare. And just about -- a little bit about Adult Education, we have one of the widest achievement gaps in the country. Even Start, is an Adult Education program that provides two generation learning and support for families needing Adult Education, either to complete high school equivalency, or to learn English. It requires that parents complete in an entire program with supports including peer learning, learning about their children or being with their children in classrooms. Plus, their children come to school with them, or are placed in quality care programs.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt Elizabeth, you're two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

ELIZABETH FRASER: Sure, I'll summarize. It has great results, and it has been terribly underfunded for many years, this type of program, which serves some of the most -- the hardest deserved parents in Connecticut really needs additional support and should be extended throughout the state. Care 4 Kids can help that. And we also do absolutely agree with the two amendments that were mentioned earlier, increasing funding paid to providers from Care 4 Kids up to the 75th percent of market rate

and also increasing funding to school readiness programs in state-funded childcare centers.

This will especially help with the increases in minimum wages that are coming forward. So thank you very much for your time, and I hope you consider our testimony.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. Thank you, Elizabeth. We do have a question from a Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hi, and very quickly, thank you so much for highlighting the good work of the Even Start programs. Can you just tell me how many do we have currently in the state?

ELIZABETH FRASER: Years ago when I first started with Even Start, because I actually worked for an Even Start program as a Director for many years, and a Curriculum Coordinator. There were 11 throughout the state. So we served quite a few people, 25 possibly or more at a time in each program. We're down to three. Each one only has one classroom left. The funding is just not sustainable, and I will tell you what they're doing, they are holding on and actually moving forward trying to do more to connect these students to workforce programs, they're doing more to try to assess that their impact on the families through really extensive assessment and opportunities. And they're using Family-Centered Coaching so that parents are designing their own goals for themselves and their children. In my testimony is a link to a little video. And if you watch that, if any of you watch that, you will get the idea of what the Even Start program really does for families. So I suggest -- I suggest that.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah, and thank you for providing that video, and I think I see Representative Sanchez shaking his head. So I know he's very supportive of -- well of these programs that are really -- gives you a true return on investment, and they help families from the children to the adults. So thank you for highlighting this success. And I know Representative Nolan agrees with me that the New London Even Start program is a wonderful program. Thank you.

ELIZABETH FRASER: It's a great program and Care 4 Kids, we're increasing funding stream, that line item would go a long way in helping to grow the program.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, I agree. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Liz, it's nice to see it. It's been a while.

ELIZABETH FRASER: I didn't even see you there, Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): I just going to echo the sentiments made by Representative McCarty. And -- with regards to Even Start and just the two generational approach, anytime we can be talking two generational approach is a successful day in my book, unfortunately, we bifurcate the process all too often when working with our families, and anytime we can be family-centered, it's definitely -- we see much more positive outcomes. So thank you for all your work. And hopefully we can find the means be able to better support these types of programs.

ELIZABETH FRASER: That would be fabulous. And, you know, just to -- just to quickly respond to

that, you know, there's been a lot of talk, you know, it's so important to have social emotional learning, you know, what we often think is that school is going to solve all the problems, unless we do some more work to help our families to get bring them to a greater opportunity, we have just been leaving a lot of families behind. And if we start looking at what families need, they will be able to -- to manage, you know, and take care of themselves. But often we isolate school and Early Care from family need, and we need to start thinking holistically.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Absolutely. Thank you for those remarks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, I'm looking at representative Comey, did you have another question? Because your hand is still up?

REP. COMEY (102ND): Oh, I haven't asked Liz a question yet, I mean, yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH FRASER: Hi Representative Comey.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Hi Liz, good to see you. The -- I know, besides -- your local and your state, I should say state advocacy efforts on these issues. The work of the two, then. You do a lot of national work as well. You mentioned in your testimony, the American Rescue Act. And I'm wondering how you think that Connecticut could pose itself and what other resources might be out there for us to -- to help improve our healthcare system. Thank you.

ELIZABETH FRASER: Well, from what I understand, at this point, the American rescue act will have \$275 million allocated to Connecticut over a two-year period, I believe it's over to your

period to -- to help to support the early care system, and really to begin to stabilize it and rebuild it to think of those innovative ways that we can start making differences in our early care system that will help move the programs to sustainability. From what we understand from national advocates, it's very important that the state use this money in this way and show the need for more funding to our government.

Many states are holding this money back, afraid that the obligations from it will cause future obligations that won't be sustainable after the two-year period. However, there is a lot of talk. If there's need to really look at a universal system of either preschool or care for our country. That would bring a lot more funding to Connecticut. We have wonderful national advocates with -- and our congressional delegation has been fabulous in pushing this work forward. They've been instrumental in getting a lot of this money \$50 billion over this whole pandemic to Early Care because of such a crisis. There is a lot of opportunity for additional funding. However, we have to make wise choices, use it appropriately, and really show that we can work to build the system but we'll need more money to get it to the place where we need it to be. Is that helpful? Maybe she left. I don't see her.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank I thought you did a great job answering the question.

ELIZABETH FRASER: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the colleagues? Seeing none, we'll move to the next presenter. Thank you, Elizabeth.



ELIZABETH FRASER: Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Elizabeth. Kara Sievel.

KARA SIEVEL: Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Kara Sievel.

KARA SIEVEL: Hi. Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): All right, there you are.

KARA SIEVEL: Here I am. Good afternoon Members of the Committee. My name is Kara Sievel, I have been an educator for the past 21 years, and I'm a middle school Literacy Specialist in Southington, Connecticut, for the past 11. I work with students in grades six, seven and eight. And I have also been leading our school and district in social emotional learning for the past five years. I'd like to thank you guys for the opportunity to testify on House 5324 AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL FUNDING. So over the -- the over the past year, our children and parents have needed us more than ever. And as educators, we've stood up to the challenge and supported our kids and our families in any and every way possible.

Recognizing the importance of teaching and supporting our children's academic, social, and emotional needs, teachers have set aside time and their own needs in order to best support their students. But we're struggling with that. You know, it's just -- it's simply not sustainable. And we really do need help. In order to provide our students with the strongest academic support, our teachers need more time for planning.

I know on average, when I come home from work, I usually get home around three and I spend, on

average, seven hours, additional hours. And on weekends, I give up most of my weekends to make sure that I am planned and prepped for the following Monday. My students, unlike some other students need even further support, so they need more individualized instruction. But another one of the big issues is just being able to juggle the in-person learners in the virtual learners.

There were days where I had students show up for class, which was exceptional, I was happy to see them there. But they didn't have the resources of the materials to be able to be actively engaged in my classroom. So one student, an example of one student was in his car driving with his family to New York City. And while I was trying to include them in the classroom, so it just made it super challenging. And I wanted him to be able to learn and get, you know, the best education that he possibly could. So when -- really, when thinking about this, you know, we just as educators, we really need the support to be able to provide the best resources and the best needs for our students. And a big part of that is -- is absolutely being able to make those connections, but it's really challenging when our students sometimes aren't there emotionally, or even physically to be able to engage in their own learning. So, you know, while virtual teaching has served us as a tool to allow for teaching and interaction throughout the COVID pandemic, there are a number of problems that educators and students and their families face due to virtual teaching and learning over the last year.

So I'm recommending that we Institute mandatory more planning times that educators are given the time to be able to learn to be able to use the resources that they have, and be able to support kids as best as they can, in their

environment. An additional hour of planning time per day, or once per week, any amount of extra planning time would be great. And also, you know, teachers should either teach remotely or in person, but not both at the same time, I think it would be so beneficial to have one person working with the virtual learners, to be able to engage with them and make -- and build those connections. I'm finding it very challenging when I'm on or the virtual learners that the in-person learners I'm not able to always hear.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you are two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

KARA SIEVEL: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. So I just want to thank you for listening. I'm hopeful that our legislators and -- that you will take our testimonies, and just sincere consideration and appreciate you taking the time to listen.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. I see a hand up.  
Representative Petit.

REP. PETIT (22ND): Thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Sievel. For what sounds like an overwhelming amount of work. Seven hours extra after you come home, is the issue that you have too many kids or too many classrooms, or that there's not enough -- if you will, standardize algorithms to follow at least as a baseline that you then can work around the kids. It seems like an awful lot of extra time. And it's not clear to me whether it's the individuality of the students or the volume of students if you could expound on that a little bit.

KARA SIEVEL: Absolutely. Now I have -- it really is just the amount of work. So the students that I have need individualized attention. So

the lesson plans that I create for them are very individualized, some of them have IEP goals, and I need to make sure that I'm meeting those needs for those kids. So oftentimes, when you look at my lesson plans, each kid will have their individualized lesson based on whatever it is that their needs are for that day. So I think that's really what it -- it's making sure that everything is uploaded, I'm also finding that some students will be in school one day, and then there'll be home the next day. And so not knowing if they're going to be in that classroom or online. Everything needs to be uploaded. And just that process alone takes time not only writing the lessons, but making sure that every kid has the uploaded assignment understands it. And you know, and that it's clear and that they can -- they're able to navigate it on their end, so that it doesn't become a strain on them.

REP. PETIT (22ND): I feel I've put you on the spot but in terms of the situation you're in, in a, you know, solving thing, which I'm right next to middle class or upper middle class, medium sized town with reasonable resources. But the challenges that you have with the kids, are you doing the work of two teachers that we need to have two people doing what you're doing? Is it -- do you think it's really teacher power where we need twice as many teachers; we have now to take care of the kids with these needs.

KARA SIEVEL: We absolutely do. Because especially, you know, students that are online, they really need -- they need to be able to make those connections. And we know that as teachers, as educators, in order for kids to be open to learning, they need to feel safe, they need to know that there's someone on the other end that's listening, and that cares about them.

And I've found in my own classroom, that even if I'm explaining the lesson, and I have maybe five or six in-person learners, and I have three or four online, and I'm trying to conference with them, one-on-one, and I'm saying listen, I'm going to confer and then I will be back in a few minutes checking on you. Some of the students get so frustrated that after a few minutes, they're like off, they just like will leave class and it's like, then I'm trying to call them and email them.

What happened, what's going on? So I think too, so much of this is we're in during a trauma right now. And so that whole social emotional piece is also huge to make sure that teachers are, you know, not only taking care of the kids but taking care of themselves so that they can be present for their kids at that time. But I do feel that more -- more people are needed. I mean, yes, I am a literacy specialist. So I may not see as many students but the needs of my students and Special Ed students that I serve as per -- it's so much greater, so much greater.

REP. PETIT (22ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, if you would indulge me, there is one more quick one, Ms. Sievel, do you think that your teaching special needs students' literacy, do you need to separate the remote kids from the in-person kids, does it really create a huge issue with attempting to do both simultaneously?

KARA SIEVEL: It is so challenging to do it simultaneously. If we were able to do the virtual learners in one group, then we could at least have a focus on this is how we need to be teaching, the teaching style would be completely different versus the in person learners. Absolutely. Yes.

REP. PETIT (22ND): Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

KARA SIEVEL: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing no hands up, we'll go to the next panelists.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next is Eva Bermudez Zimmerman. Eva Bermudez. I see her here. Eva Bermudez Zimmerman. Okay, we'll go -- we'll head on to Daniel Pearson. Daniel Pearson, there we go.

DANIEL PEARSON: Yes, I'm here. Thank you. Chairs Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez. Ranking Members and other distinguished Members of Education Committee. My name is Daniel Pearson. I'm the state Director for Educators for Excellence, Connecticut. A teacher-led organization when nearly 1000 Members statewide that seeks to elevate teacher voice and policy decisions.

Today I submit testimony on behalf of the Members who are current classroom teachers and who work every day to ensure that their students have the best educational experience possible. These teachers work with the very students affected by these policies. And we urge you to support House Bill 6556, House Bill 6557, House Bill 6558, and Senate Bill 977. I submitted my written testimony and will -- and will speak to the 6556 and 6558. E4E is in support of House Bill 6556, the consequence of COVID-19 are rippling through our communities, further exacerbating the inequities in the education system, and putting incredible pressure on educators to navigate the uncertainty of remote and hybrid learning with few resources.

This pandemic has shined a light on the massive opportunity gaps that exist for our most vulnerable students. And we must develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate learning loss from this pandemic, while also developing long term solutions to finally address the structural inequities in our education system. This includes, but is not limited to enhancing after school and summer programming, highly focused on highly individualized tutoring program, during and after school hours and ensuring districts have the necessary resources to create and sustain these programs. Finally, our teachers have been working with other education advocate organizations to better understand and identify what student engagement looks like in practice.

We recommend strengthening this Bill by adding the recommendations provided to you by ConnCAN on clearly defining student engagement and disengagement. By having a clear definition, we can better assess the impact of our programs, and have the data that -- that more accurately illustrates our student's level of engagement.

E4E is in support of House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING. It goes without saying that this past year has been incredibly difficult for us all, especially our youth. And now more than ever, we need to make substantial investments in our students' social and emotional wellbeing. House Bill 6557, is a much needed first step in deepening the social emotional supports available within schools by setting ratio limits for mental health professionals. This ensures those professionals are not overwhelmed by the amount of students they work with, and can give the students the intimate individualized attention they need and deserve. It's long overdue for us to prioritize the social emotional wellbeing of our students, teachers, mental health

professionals and the urges Committee to vote for this Bill.

To highlight the report earlier from Sarah Eagan from the Office of the Child Advocate. I'm highlighting how many times as sorrows and police officers were called to talk about -- to address social emotional support for our students, and also to Representative Nolan's comments earlier regarding officers having to do too much outside of their special -- specialties.

The same goes for teachers, teachers are asked to be counselors, social workers, psychologists as well as teachers. And it's unfair for the students. It's unfair that teachers -- and we need to make this a high priority. And lastly, since I do have time, I will talk about the virtual learning as we approach a year of remote and hybrid learning, we have learned a lot and it's evident that virtual learning will be a part of public education going forward. That is why we urge this Committee to pass Senate Bill 977 and create a uniform set of guidelines for virtual learning and ensure we invest in professional development for our teachers focused on remote teaching. This will allow us, districts, teacher students and families be better prepared for the next time this happens. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Pearson. I don't see any questions from Committee Members. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Pearson. Thank you.

DANIEL PEARSON: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I'm going to go back to Eva Bermuda Zimmerman. She was in the waiting room.



EVA BERMUDA ZIMMERMAN: Thank you, Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are. Okay. Hi.

EVA BERMUDA ZIMMERMAN: My internet connection was a little faulty there. But that is the life of zoom. So thank you for calling my name again. Hello, Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory, Members of the Education Committee, always an honor to have -- have such dedicated crew Members here and legislators, talking about advocacy in education.

I do want to, in support of 6558, I do want to start with, thank you for taking the time out legislators for creating a Bill and adding into it. Very important sections that that affects early education. I do support the Bill. I'm here on behalf of SEIU CSCA, Local seven one, we represent 25,000 workers throughout the state of Connecticut. Within that workforce, we have childcare providers, and the child care providers who are doing CARE4Kids are home based providers. We also have center providers as well. Within this Bill, 6558. There are two sections that we're just asking you to revise very quickly before it's fully fledged law. And that's Section 2 and Section 4. Section 2, when you're looking at education, and you're looking at the details of the Bill, we want to make sure that you include home-based providers. And we also asked in Section four when you're looking at the task force again once more to include home-based providers and home-based provider coalition Members who are part of our advocacy group.

We are also asking that when you're creating and looking at the educational components and enrichment of this Taskforce, that you take into consideration the difficulties that it will be to implement such a Bill if it's not fully funded. So to echo Karen Rainville, echo

Merrill Gay, echo Liz Fraser, echo Representative Farrar, we do support this Bill, but we do hope that you take in consideration the importance of fully funding educational programs for providers. We do understand how important it is to have educational components available for provider centers and home-base alike. But in order to fully implement successful programming, we need funding to back it up. I'll open myself up for questions. I know that time is short here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Eva, and you're absolutely correct. Home-base for our providers are so important. And I know quite a few of them here in New Britain. I don't see any other hands up at this moment. But thank you so much for your testimony, Eva.

EVA BERMUDA ZIMMERMAN: Thank you all, have a great day.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have Sharon Veatch. Am I pronouncing your last name correctly?

SHARON VEATCH: You're right, ready to go. You got it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You're next.

SHARON VEATCH: Oh, thank you so much. I'm a little nervous. So bear with me. Thank you very much to the esteemed Members of the Education Committee for allowing me to speak today. My name is Sharon Veatch. I'm a high school counselor in the rural, yes it does exist, rural part of Connecticut. In Falls village, Connecticut. I live in Morris, Connecticut, and I am testifying today on House Bill 657 CONCERNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING specifically about the ratio for school counselors of 250:1 and 80% of the school

Counselors time being spent in direct services with students.

As a rural public high school Counselor, I have limited outside agency resources. So as one of the Senators alluded to earlier, working closely with state and community agencies is preferred. But as a school, because of schools, we can't do it all. But what happens when they are non-existent in our area, which is where I am. We have 36% of our students that receive free and reduced lunch. I am fortunate enough to have a caseload of 160 students, but I can tell you, especially this year, past year, but even before this past year, my days are full.

With an increase in the anxiety and depression diagnoses of adolescence, reaching an epidemic level, the mental health support within schools is necessary, social emotional learning is necessary. This increased level started prior to the pandemic in 2014. I referenced in my written testimony, [child.minder.org](http://child.minder.org), which valuated research indicating the prevalent -- prevalence of diagnosis of depression, anxiety, and teens. And it was already increasing by 30% over 2010.

We are the frontlines for students and their families to receive support whether through programming, therapeutic groups, or individual counseling. We are trained to do all this in addition to academic career and college counseling. The pandemic has just amplified the call for already existing needs for our students, I worry about every one of those students that I can't get to or have the ability to see as often as needed, until they can be referred to an outside provider or when they're being referred or released from hospitalization, and they don't have an outside provider.

I also worry about the other students throughout the state that have even less access to someone to help them manage their mental health academics and Career and College aspirations which are all intertwined. Even with a small number of students, I still feel like there are those that are missing throughout the day, we have only a few places in our area that will or can supply therapeutic services to low income students. Many families either do not have a car or only have one car to drive to the closest state agency, which in my district is 45 minutes away. It is an hour and a half from other parts of my district. This makes what I do even more important,

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you're are at two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

SHARON VEATCH: Thank you. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates students need to meet -- we need to make sure they are fed and have their basic needs met before they can learn. Sometimes schools is the place to make sure this happens. COVID very much showed some of the need for that in our educational process. While my ratio seems small, my job is big with lack of resources, availability of outside agencies, my job becomes even bigger. It's exhausting. I'm exhausted. But I do it every day, including nights for the students in my area. Thank you so much for allowing me to testify today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Miss Veatch, just a quick question as a counselor, how much work daily do you spend actually working with families and with the students? Because I've heard -- I've heard in the past where many counselors are -- are basically told to do other assignments, like take attendance and so

forth. So how much of your day is actually spent with the families and children?

SHARON VEATCH: I would say that 50% of my day, I'm fortunate to be in a district where we have restructured due to advocacy on our parts. We only have two school counselors in our school and we have sent some of those like testing etc. But we still are pulled to do proctoring for testing, we are still pulled to do coverage if it's needed. And we still have to beg for time in the classroom to meet with students to do our lessons about anxiety, depression, college planning, career planning. So I'm fortunate that I'm in a district that is allowing me to have that access, but it should be 80% of my time, and I would say it's about 50% of my time. Others are meetings about what we should do with students.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And I agree with you, it should be 80% or more.

SHARON VEATCH: Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We do have a question from Representative Comey.

REP. COMEY(102ND): Great. Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony. Sharon. Do you have a -- so I'm going to assume that you don't have -- I'm not sure where your town is located, I apologize -- what part of the state? But do you have access to school-based health centers in your community?

SHARON VEATCH: We do not? Oh, I'm sorry, I apologize. We do not --the one mental health counseling agency that we had, when I started here in 2011 was closed due to budgetary cuts at the state level. It was located in Canaan, Connecticut. So we're Kent, Salisbury, just so we give you a reference if that helps you a

little, Sharon and Cornwall. And we -- the one mental health agency we had that would accept Husky insurance. Now the state insurance closed in 2014. So now the closest place besides HYFSP we have -- which we do have access to the Hispanic Youth and Family Service bureau which has a lot of turnover, and it's full right now, not accepting new clients, is Torrington or New Milford. So 45 minutes from my closest families.

REP. COMEY (102ND): Yeah, we hear that a lot. And we didn't recognize what the role is school based health center, play in communities, especially that -- that have fewer resources like yours. Thank you so much for taking your time to testify.

SHARON VEATCH: Thank you for having me.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much, Miss Veatch. Thank you for your testimony.

SHARONN VEATCH: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have Andrew Feinstein.

ANDREW FEINSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Andy Feinstein, I represent SEEKs, Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Today the Committee takes up a number of Bills of great significance to students with disabilities and their families.

We have numerous comments that we've supplied in our written testimony that I'm sure you'll take into consideration. I'll speak in favor of raise Bill 6557 on social emotional learning. My colleague Diane Wilcox will later testify on raised Bill 976, where we support Section 1 but strongly oppose the Taskforce in section 2. Terry Bedard will address raised Bill 6556 and

977, Bills which are accepted -- acceptable as they stand but wholly inadequate to address the issues raised by COVID. Our written testimony also includes concerns with Senate Bill 2, which is before the Children's Committee but is certain to be referred to this Committee, and we may not have another opportunity to issue testimony on it.

Two years ago, the legislature created a high level collaborative on social emotional learning, on which I'm honored to serve. Through numerous meetings the collaborative has discussed the proposals contained in this legislation. As such, this legislation offers a roadmap for dealing with the mental health needs of school -- of school students and school staff. We as a society have made schools the first responders for students with emotional needs. Community Health Services are limited as we just heard, underfunded and ill-equipped to deal with the tremendous needs that exists. Law enforcement often exacerbates the issue. Hospital emergency rooms cannot provide continuing care. The responsibility is left almost by default to our public schools. And the cases of trauma, anxiety school avoidance, suicidal ideation and depression are skyrocketing among schoolchildren.

This trend was clear before COVID-19 but the shutdowns have caused an explosion in these conditions. SEEK supports 6557, it creates a needed screening mechanism and embed social emotional learning and restorative justice in all elements of the educational establishment. Perhaps of greatest significance section two establishes staffing ratios for school mental health staff. Under this legislation for every 1000 students, the district would need to employ four counselors, four social workers, four family therapists and two school psychologists. Currently, the statewide

averages, we only have it for the aggravated group, but under current statewide averages, there are seven such staff for a thousand, rather than 14. So the requirements of this Bill would represent a doubling of our current social emotional staff support level. We support social emotional supports as a way to finally rid Connecticut schools of exclusionary discipline, such as suspension, expulsion, and police referrals.

Indeed, in 2018, the Department of Education published an excellent booklet on best practices for expelled students. The publication describes a therapeutic setting, which should be standard.

DALLAS EMERLE: Excuse me—

ANDREW FEINSTEIN: I hear you Dallas. The publication describes the therapeutic setting, which should be the standard for students whose maladaptive behavior makes it necessary to remove them from the regular classroom. Such a therapeutic setting should be used instead of the exclusionary discipline. House Bill 6557 hopefully starts us down the path of treating behavior as the sole -- as the social emotional issue it is and stop treating misbehavior in school as law enforcement issue. Again, appreciate the opportunity to testify, and then pledge to continue to work with the Committee as we have in the past.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Feinstein. I don't see any hands up. So thank you for your testimony, sir.

ANDREW FEINSTEIN: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next I have David Kulick. David, did I did I torture your last name?



DAVID KULICK: No, not bad at all. Thank you so much. It's actually Dave Kulick, and good afternoon Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Dave, David Kulick and I am the Co-president of Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children and fortunate to live in Mystic.

On behalf of our nearly 1100 Early Childhood Education professionals across the state that make up our Membership. We'd like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 6558. There are several sections of this Bill as Karen pointed out earlier that our organization supports specifically the provision for student loan forgiveness and refundable tax credits for Early Childhood teachers. And, as you know, as has been pointed out earlier by Merrill, Liz, and Karen Rainville, before me, Early Childhood teachers are some of the lowest paid professionals in our state. In Connecticut, the average Early Childhood teacher salary is just over \$26,000 with the federal poverty level of 26,500. For a family of four this means that 53% of our Early Childhood teachers nationally and 14% in Connecticut, in Connecticut are educating our youngest children, yet living in poverty themselves.

With this in mind, we have strong reservations about section six this Bill, establishing a Taskforce to analyze and make recommendations concerning Early Childhood Educator compensation, credentialing and competencies through relevant equity based practices, degree programs and alternative pathways that meet the workforce development needs of the early care and education sectors. Connecticut AEYC Members have been testifying and testified in support of the original school readiness legislation in 1997. And have been providing testimony since

1997. And every piece of legislation since 1997, has made changes to the education requirements for Early Childhood teachers in the expectation that these changes would lead to highly qualified teachers and increased compensation.

Now, here we are in 2021. And not one thing has been done to address the appalling low wages of Early Childhood teachers. All we have succeeded in doing is putting higher expectations on a truly undervalued workforce. So I sit here before you today on behalf of our 1100 Members, saying enough is enough. We cannot continue developing Committees and Taskforce to plan for more changes to the educator requirements in this profession until we finally address compensation issues in Early Childhood. History has shown us that just putting compensation language in legislation does nothing to fix the problem. Public -- Public Act No. 19-61 enacted in 2019 required the Office for Early Childhood develop a plan for Early Childhood educator compensation

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, David, you're a two-and-a half-minute if you don't mind summarizing.

DAVID KULICK: Perfect based on experience level and degree attainment. Connecticut AEYC asks you to pull out the 2019 plan, review it, update it. But please do not put together yet another group that will place unfounded requirements on this profession. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. And Connecticut AEYC look forward to continuing this important conversation with you.

REP. SHANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, David and I would love to have a conversation with you after you know because I have quite a few questions to ask you. I don't see any hands up right here

at the moment. So thank you so much for your testimony. And I look forward to having this conversation with you.

DAVID KULICK: I will reach out to you by all means  
Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next I have -  
let's see -- Shellye Davis

SHELLYE DAVIS: Good afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

SHELLYE DAVIS: Hi. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. I am Shellye Davis, I am President of the Hartford Federation of Para-educators. I am Divisional Vice President of AFT for PSRP and I'm also the Co-Chair of the state Para-educator Advisory Council. I am here to testify on House Bill 6557, section 17 and 18. The role of the Para-educator in the classroom has changed drastically. We are an integral part of the student support team, often working with the- [inaudible]

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Shellye.

SHELLYE DAVIS: Okay, we support our students' -- we support our students' social emotional behavior and educational needs as well as playing a crucial role in the implementation of students individualized education plans. Since the pandemic, the role of the Para-educator has expanded, and we have often found ourselves stepping up into the roles previously assigned to certified staff. We are educators in every sense of the word. As Members of the educational team, it is necessary that we work to break down the silos that unnecessarily limit communication and collaboration in our schools. From inclusion at PPT meetings to

district PDECs, recognizing the full partnership and potential of para-educators in public education will only be in the best interest of the students we serve.

Because of the ever increasing expectations in the roles we play, it is imperative that we validate the importance of para-educators in the public educational system by giving proper credence and respect to the profession. We do this by compensating para-educators for the invaluable role they play by paying them a living wage, providing health insurance to ensure they in their families are healthy, so they can show up every day for our kids and provide them with a proper retirement pension. There currently exists great disparities from district to district in terms of pay and compensation for para-educators, we must codify the expectation that districts set aside time and funding for regular professional development opportunities for para-educators. Just as they do for teachers, for many districts in Connecticut professional learning for parents, and it is an afterthought, if there is time provided, usually only after being demanded in negotiations and by contractual agreement. There is usually no-

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you're at-two-and a-half-minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

SHELLYE DAVIS for such program. Thank you. So the great disparities, the para-educator, the students they serve in the entire Education team of educators and support personnel they work with. I'm going to stop there, I'm going to be respectful of the time I did submit written testimony for you. The last thing I want to say is I said on the Moore Committee, Commission, Special Education Select Working Group in 2015 -- and so with that being said, we were

asking for some of these same things in 2015. And I think it's time. So if there are any questions, I'd be very happy to answer them. And thank you for the opportunity to testify.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much, Miss Davis. And I just want to remind people to please keep yourselves muted until called upon. I don't see any specific -- let's see. No, I don't see anything here. But absolutely, I agree with you pair - para- professionals -- educators are very important and key. And I also noticed in the past, when I visited some of the classrooms, but particularly Special Ed classrooms, I would see the Special Ed teacher, we'd be away from the room because they were at an PPT or an IEP or whatever. And that para was in the classroom actually running that classroom of students. And they're not compensated at all for doing that type of work. And they're -- and they're left out of the training as well. So we really need to look at that moving forward. But thank you so much for your testimony. Next I have Laiza Melendez.

LAIZA MELENDEZ: Hello. Thank you for having me. I'm the New London, Even Start Director, and I'm here on behalf of our Even Start Coalition, which includes Middletown, and Torrington as well. I will give a brief description of our program and two examples of how it has helped two of our past participants and where they stand right now after completing our program. So as others have mentioned before, Even Start is a two generation program working with the entire family. The program has a comprehensive approach of integrative components, which include adult education, workforce readiness, parenting education, Early Childhood Education, interactive literacy, in home visiting, intended to collectively reduce adversity and build capacity.

The goal of this program is to engage the parents access to adult learners to provide them with opportunities that will lead to economic self-sufficiency to assist the parents in becoming a full partner in their child's education, to provide high quality Early Childhood Education, which will be the foundation for success in school and to help these families break the cycle of illiteracy.

Focusing on the entire family is an investment in building strong human capital and healthy productive adults. We serve young economically and educationally-disadvantaged families considered to be the most in need and the hardest to serve. Our program is a second chance as many -- as many have faced adversity in many areas of their life. Parents enroll in our educational programs, either to complete their high school education, get a GED or learn English. Parents attend their classes. Their children participate in age appropriate high quality, early learning programs to prepare them for future academic success. Children are evaluated based on ages and stages and other assessments. If there is a delay in any area of the child is referred for an evaluation and possible services. Early intervention is key to academic achievement, behavioral educational progression in attainment, and this reduces the amount of money we spend in Special Education if we do an early intervention.

Even Start participants also engage in workforce readiness, they create portfolios, resumes, cover letters, sample job applications. There also do literacy -- digital literacy training to be ready for the computer world nowadays, and this is a perfect example everything is via zoom nowadays. We also provide vocational training in a variety of clusters to include technical services, healthcare, and technology.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry, you're at the two-and-a-half-minute mark if you don't mind summarizing. Thank you.

LAIZA MELENDEZ: Thank you. In a study conducted with our participants after completing our program, their wages increased by 40%. So to give you two examples, I have a mother of three who started to complete her high school diploma that's what she was in need with. She also completed the medical receptionist terminology course, her -- she's currently working as a dental receptionist in New York. Her children are at a higher level in reading into grade levels in math. We also had another mother who completed our GED program in Spanish, then later completed English as a second language courses. She is currently a para-professional, in our New London public school system. Her youngest is in middle school in her oldest is graduating from college this year. Thank you for listening in. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much. I don't see any hands up from Members. Also, thank you so much for your testimony. Miss Melendez.

LAIZA MELENDEZ: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, I have Marlo Greponne, someone that I've known for many, many, many years. Hi, Marlo. Nice to see you.

MARLO GREPONNE: Hello, Representative Sanchez. Affectionately known as Mr. Bobby. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Marlo Greponne and I'm the executive director of HRA of New Britain. And thank you for this opportunity to testify today concerning House Bill 6558. AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROVISIONS OF EARLY

CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT  
and House Bill 6559 AN ACT CONCERNING THE  
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY  
CHILDHOOD.

I have submitted my testimony in writing for your reference, so I will skim through some of these pieces to make sure that I have an opportunity to share with you those parts that are most relevant. So HRA is committed to improving outcomes for children in Connecticut. For over 55 years, we have dedicated efforts toward improving conditions for children ages zero to five from diverse and impoverished communities. It is our passion and commitment to deliver quality affordable education or care for the most vulnerable citizens in our region. Which brings me here today to urge your support for House Bill 6558 and House Bill 6559.

We support increasing resources to support parent and family engagement for enhancing quality of services to children across the state. HR is a long term successful provider of culturally competent head start, early head start, school readiness and childcare services for nearly 800 children annually in New Britain in Bristol. We have a history of valuing, supporting, and incorporating parent voice in the design and delivery of programming to best meet the needs of children. This is a critical change that could improve services across the state. We support student loan forgiveness for Early Childhood educators, the future of Early Childhood Education is important. However, at present, there is a network of community based Early Childhood Education teachers, which have already demonstrated their personal and professional commitment to the field by attaining associate's and bachelor's degrees to meet the qualifications for delivering high quality Early Childhood programming. Our teachers, many of which are women of color have



also demonstrated their commitment to underserved communities by remaining in the community-based field despite the low wages.

We support the expansion of eligibility for CARE4Kids program to parents and caretakers engaged in education, job training and job search activities. Connecticut is one of only two states that do not allow parents caretakers with low income enrolled in post-secondary and job training or higher education to receive Connecticut's childcare subsidy. Through the delivery of our services to low income people and communities of color, we see firsthand the great need—

DALLAS EMERLE; Hi, ma'am you're at two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

MARLO GRAPONNE: Thank you. We support adequate compensation for community based Early Childhood educators. During the height of the pandemic while most of the education systems were shut down, our teachers were on the frontlines carrying the burden of care and managing on-site programming in accordance with current CDC, DPH, OEC recommended guidance and following regulations on additional measures implemented to ensure the safety of staff and children over the past year, all without additional compensation.

As the communities we serve turn to recovery beyond the pandemic, we look to our Early Childhood Education teachers to continue to be at the center of these efforts, providing support to the healthy growth of development and of the young children with while enabling low parent - low income parents to obtain training and seek employment. But can our teachers look forward to being valued, respected, and acknowledged for the hard work and efforts by financially receiving proper compensation? I

urge you to consider directing resources to address the lack of compensation for Early Childhood educators and community based settings. Engage parents and families in educating children. Expand eligibility for care for kids to create opportunities for families to get ahead, and compensate community based Early Childhood Education staff to stabilize a workforce that has long been the backbone of supporting people and communities of color in need of quality and affordable care. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you Marlo and ditto ditto ditto ditto. I'm telling you this --this has been a struggle up here, you know. Every -- every year, this is brought to everyone's attention, particularly about the compensation and -- and it seems that our government tends to not find the funds that we need in order to help families, in order to help these teachers. So I'm hoping that this year we can finally get something done and moved out of our Committee and onto the floor.

Get it voted on and get it passed and signed by the Governor, because it's time -- you know, we heard today testimony from so many people that this goes back beyond 2005. And here we are in 2021. And we're still talking about a salary of \$26,000 for a teacher, a preschool teacher with a bachelor's degree. Unbelievable. It's I just -- well, I don't have to say anymore because I've been saying it for such a long time. I just hope that you this time around, we can get something done. Because we really, really need to focus on this this year. I don't see any other hands up. I just wanted to ask really quick --during this pandemic -- and you know that there are many parents kept their kids home and they were -- the enrollment was low. Did you provide virtual learning to

parents that wanted that for their preschool children?

MARLO GRAPONNE: We did, we did offer remote learning option we called it -- of course, for the age group that we provide, which is children zero to five, we don't find that strategy to be very effective for the child, but it's more effective for the parent. So utilizing that time to help the parent to really understand how they can affect their child's learning is a better use of the remote learning than trying to engage with the child who is zero to five.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay, great. That's good to know. Okay. So I don't see any other questions. So thank you so much for your testimony. I look forward to reading your submitted testimony and, and I will definitely reach out to you.

MARLO GRAPONNE: Thank you. Thank you for all your hard work.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next, we have -- I have Tracy Madden-Hennessy. Tracy.

TRACEY MADDEN-HENNESSEY: Hi Bobby.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi Tracey, how are you?

TRACEY MADDEN-HENNESEY: Good, how are you? New Britain's well,

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I know, [inaudible] and in a row.

TRACEY MADDEN-HENNESEY: Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Tracy Madden-Hennessy. I'm the Executive Director of the YWCA in New Britain. I also have a

leadership role under Britain's Coalition for Youth. And I'm here to support House 6558, the Education Department's multi-part Bill on Early Childhood and although I support all the measures that assist those working in the field with compensation, as we've been talking about, and I support measures to increase eligibility for the CARE4Kids program. Really what I wanted to address today was the childcare incubator project included in this -- in this Bill. And this project is particularly important to New Britain, given the long standing shortage of infant toddler care in our community.

It's an innovative concept that molds a business incubator model with that a family daycare. In 2018 a proposal for this concept received the Zanes Early Childhood innovation prize from Harvard University submitted by our youth coalition. Prior to the pandemic 92% of New Britain's children under age three did not have access to quality childcare in our community. That situation has only gotten worse with reductions in infant toddler spots throughout the community as a result of the pandemic. And despite multiple discussions and explorations of this issue. For more than 10 years, our community has come no closer to closing this gap. Given the current SHE session, this shortage impacts the ability of women who are trying to return to the workplace. In New Britain this is important as the rate of children and single female headed households is twice that of the state of Connecticut. In some neighborhoods, it's four times that of the state, many of them living in poverty.

Local surveys of parents with young children indicate they prefer a home setting over an institutional setting for infants and toddlers. And this model is viewed as a viable way to address the shortage of care for very young

children communities that also have a shortage of owner occupied housing. More than 60% of New Britain residents rent, making operating a business from home difficult and many of our families, particularly those with a single Head of Household are also low income. Thus the cost of licensing and equipping home space to operate a home daycare is prohibitive. Community Service Providers school district representatives and parent representatives began talking about this concept in 2017. So this is our third time around. So hopefully, third time's a charm. And our vision for an Early Childhood business incubator, private and shared space we provide individuals who want to run their own childcare business, a place to start. The concept also includes training related to business operations and child development.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry Tracy, you're at two minutes and 30 seconds if you don't mind summarizing.

TRACEY MADDEN-HENESSEY: Thanks, typically those who operate out of their home are isolated from others doing this work. An incubator will give providers supportive peers who could share resources making this arrangement safer, given that the concept is new, action must be taken so that the pilot testing the concepts viability can move forward. This legislation in a limited sense, addresses the regulation need to bring this concept to fruition. So thank you for consideration of this of this -- of this request and I'm hoping that we can get it done this year.

REP SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much. I know that you submitted that language about two or three years ago in regards to the incubator program, and hopefully we're going to get it through this session. Finally, because it's something that's much needed. Thank you so much, Tracey.

I don't see any other hands up. So I'm going to be moving on to the next person. Thank you.

LISA TEPPER BATES: Mr. Chair, if it please the Chair, I believe you've skipped over me by accident. This is Lisa Tepper Bates. I was 48

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, I'm going to I'm going back because I noticed that the names didn't show up here. But before you there was an Elizabeth Karlan. Elizabeth Karlan. I can see Elizabeth Karlan on the phone, but I don't know if she's listening. Okay, so we'll go right to you, Lisa.

LISA TEPPER BATES: Thank you very much. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of House Bill 6558, AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROVISIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT. I'm here to speak before you today in both my capacity as President and CEO of United Way of Connecticut and as co-convenor of the campaign for working Connecticut, which is a statewide coalition of diverse stakeholders collaborating to position Connecticut and families here for success.

The campaign for work in Connecticut supports expanding CARE for Kids childcare subsidies to parents and caretakers that have low income who are seeking employment, enrolled in school, or participating in post-secondary education, adult basic education, job training, and industry certificate programs. As you have heard from many other speakers here today, Connecticut is one of only two states that does not allow low income residents enrolled in post-secondary job training, or higher education to receive childcare subsidy. This lack of access has for some time, worked against our state as an impediment to the

efforts of many residents to achieve financial stability through education and skill development.

Further, as our state looks to our recovery from this public health emergency and its economic impact, we must bear in mind the disproportionate impact of the COVID crisis on women, in particular women of color. These Connecticut residents need access to supports like childcare, as they seek to reenter the workforce, and to secure better jobs through post-secondary education and certification. Access to affordable childcare is one of the biggest obstacles to completing post-secondary education and industry certifications. For young families in Connecticut, childcare, even more so than housing is the largest monthly expense.

I believe you're familiar with the research of the United Ways of Connecticut the LS Report, which helps to reflect the high costs of living in Connecticut. The 2020 LS report reflects that it costs nearly \$1900 per month to provide child care for one infant and one preschooler in registered family childcare. House Bill 6558 seeks to address that issue to expand eligibility in the CARE4Kids program to parents and caretakers who are enrolled in high school, or enrolled in a number of other types of public and independent, higher education or skills training and certification programs. Expanding access to necessary supports like childcare will help ensure job seekers, workers and students have the knowledge skills and pathway to meet employers' middle skilled talent priorities, and to support our businesses so that we can achieve the economic growth that will get Connecticut back on our feet.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Together, we can recover and rebuild our Connecticut workforce. Expanding eligibility for CARE4Kids will enable more workers to build the skills that we need, and the skills that lead to good jobs that can support the economic aspirations of our residents. While Connecticut can experience the economic growth and achieved the prosperity, that we're all hoping we will, I'd be glad to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Miss Bates. And you're absolutely correct. We have to expand our workforce but we have to also provide the childcare, which is crucial. I don't see any hands off for any questions. So thank you so much for your testimony. I'm going to go back to Elizabeth Karlan. I see you, there you are.

ELIZABETH KARLAN: Hi, thank you. Hello, good afternoon, everybody could afternoon distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Elizabeth Karlan. I'm a high school history teacher and I've been teaching for about 10 years. I've been teaching a dual instruction setting or hybrid model to both my in-person students and my virtual students since August.

I'm here today to speak out against Bill, Senate Bill 977. And let you know, some of my experience. Virtual learning both fully virtual and dual instruction. I really believe it harms the school community, it decreases engagement and it promotes isolation. In my classroom this year, I see students who are virtual struggling to engage and stay focused while at home with siblings, parents unlimited distractions and technology problems. They can't engage in the materials in the same way and they're struggling much more academically than I've ever seen before. High school



students find virtual classrooms to be a little awkward and most rarely speak up unless directly called upon. I pride myself with having a classroom environment that is a place where they can expand their worldview be curious and feel safe. But I found, for my virtual students, it's extremely hard, almost impossible to create that environment for them this year. And since they aren't in school, they can't spend time with their peers. These students become more isolated with virtual learning, and we've seen a major increase in anxiety and depression.

I also see these struggles firsthand with my own daughter who is in first grade who can't properly engage in her own virtual learning. The few times our district has had to go virtual, it is not possible for my daughter to learn on her own. And as a working parent, I can't sit with her all day while she's at school. Teaching hybrid or the dual instruction model is no easy feat. I've had to throw out about 90% of my lesson plans. I've become adept in different kinds of technologies to promote engagement, all of which work to varying degrees, but are no substitute for what we could really do with a classroom full of kids. When I teach I wear a microphone, and I have my laptop next to my computer. So I can see the students were virtual. As I present information on the board. Or if I'm moving around the room, God forbid the Wi-Fi doesn't work. Or if one of my planned online activities is down. I can no longer quietly inquire if virtual students have the missing work or check inconspicuously. Everything requires more time. And it's time I just don't have. I'm exhausted every day.

But really, I'm one of the lucky teachers I work in a high achieving wealthy district remote students are coming to school and they do have

the technology. Even if it breaks sometimes, I can't actually comprehend what it's like in districts who have a large amount of the student body who haven't attended school since March. I become so sad when I think about how much harm the virtual Elizabeth here two minutes 30 seconds if you don't harm the virtual setting-

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt Elizabeth, you're at two minutes 30 seconds if you don't mind.

ELIZABETH KARLAN: -- harm the virtual setting is doing to these students and the how the achievement gap in Connecticut continues to widen. We need to limit student exposure to virtual learning and its potential for long term inequities and harm. I am asking that you, one, limit virtual learning to emergencies like this pandemic; two, include the input of as many teachers as you possibly can all over the state if you decide to go forward with this Bill; and three, limit the mandated professional development for virtual settings.

We should be moving past this terrible year. And professional development no matter how good really can't make virtual learning an adequate substitute for in-person learning. Thank you very much, and I appreciate your time.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Miss Karlan. Thank you for the work you do and I can only imagine how hard it's been this past year with this pandemic and -- and learning remotely. I do have a question from Representative Pettit.

REP. PETIT (22ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your hard work. I had asked previously a lady who was a literacy teacher and had a lot of special -- some Special Ed students with special needs students with your group sounds like a slightly different group. The question

is, do you think that you can successfully teach a hybrid model remote and in-person or that if it has to be done in an emergency situation that it'd be two separate two separate teachers if you will, as opposed to one.

ELIZABETH KARLAN: I'm sorry, I have to be clear. I do actually have a varying level of students. I teach students who are higher needs and I do teach AP level as well. So I see those -- those kind of gifted high achieving students. You know, teachers are making this year work in the hybrid schedule. I would not say it's successful in any way, shape, or form. I have a student who goes abroad, he goes to China to take math competitions and does quite well. He is struggling to stay engaged like a top student. So my kids who are Special Needs or who are even just regular students, regular teenagers, really struggle they struggle to just be here in the room with me when they have that computer in front of them.

And so I really don't think it can be successful. I think you could make it work, I just wouldn't call it success. And I certainly think if you had to have a choice of you know, you're going to do the hybrid instruction or like a fully -- I've done a couple times this year where our district has been fully remote for weather or staff problems. The fully remote if I have everybody on the computer in the same place that is easier, because you can kind of track them. But it's really hard when you have a struggling student, you know, normally in class, they can just go up and you know, tap them on the desk or check in. You can't with these kids and kids know when they're not doing well and they evade even more. So you see all those social emotional problems kind of layer on top of one another on top of their academic problems, and it just creates a huge mess.

REP. PETIT (22ND): No, I thank you for that. I've observed that, and I have one with my first grader here, and he struggled like crazy from home. And he's a dramatically happier seven-year-old in person back at school. So for him, that's -- that's a huge difference. I thank you for your efforts. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. We also have a question from representative Callahan.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Karlan, thank you so much. I feel like I'm talking to my wife who is a teacher. She comes home every night, and I -- she tries to do the best job. She works in a school district and in my area. But the kids that are home and learning online, are -- it's very difficult to bifurcate and try and do both at once. She's dedicated, she's exhausted, you -- everything that you said, I hear it when she walks through the door. So I understand where you're coming from, it's very difficult. And I think the schools really need to look at it. If we are going to have virtual learning to have a teacher in each grade level perhaps dedicated to that. I've heard -- I've heard that kicked around. But you did a very good job testifying, I know it can be unnerving coming before this -- this Brady Bunch look on the on your computer. And -- and you did a really good job. And your -- your concerns are being echoed by a lot of teachers around the state. So thank you.

ELIZABETH KARLAN: Well, thank you. And I know, at the high school, doing -- an individual teacher for each class would be a difficult thing. But definitely at the elementary level. I think

that's a wonderful idea. Thank you very much, everybody.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative and thank you, Elizabeth. Next up, I have John Murphy. Is John Murphy -- there you go. Hi, John.

JOHN MURPHY: Good afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You have the floor.

JOHN MURPHY: Thank you. Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel. Senator McCrory if he's still [inaudible] Members of the [inaudible]. My name is John Murphy. And on behalf of the United Auto Workers. I'm here to testify in favor of House Bill 6557 [inaudible] Learning and 6556 AN ACT ADDRESSING ISSUES BY THE [inaudible]. We represent para-educators in Stanford. And you know, first of all, I would like to associate my remarks with Shellye Davis, [inaudible] teachers who represents the para-professionals. She outlined the needs of standardization for [inaudible]

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): John, you've been breaking up. We can only hear bits and pieces of your testimony.

JOHN MURPHY: Maybe I should -- I'll sign off and see if I can make this better. I don't know if I can but it might.

REP. SANCHEZ (25): Okay, so I'm going to move to the next one. And we'll come back to you. Christopher Kukk.

CHRISTOPHER KUKK. Yes. Hi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you go. How are you?

CHRISTOPHER KUKK: Doing well, sir. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ: You have the floor.

CHRISTOPHER KUKK: Thank you, Chairman Sanchez, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of House Bill 6557. My name is Dr. Chris Kukk. I'm Dean of the Cormier Honors College at Longwood University in Virginia. However, I'm a product of the Connecticut public school system. A longtime resident of Brookfield Connecticut, I just left the great state of Connecticut this summer. And a former professor of 20 years at Western Connecticut State University. Connecticut is in my blood. So I thank you for this opportunity. And I've been working in the field of social emotional learning for over 15 years. This is near and dear to my heart. I'm also on the Board of Directors for the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, and you'll hear the Chief of the -- Chief Movement Officer at later on today. I have three main points in my testimony one, neuroscience second is the cost of social emotional learning, and what it means to our communities in Connecticut. I still have my family back in Connecticut, and what it means for scores, academic scores.

First, in terms of neuroscience. Neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio, first one to show this in the late 1990s. He showed that emotion, no matter how paradoxical, it seems, is the foundation of logic, rationality, and intellect, yes, emotion. And on that specifically in this Bill, on House Bill 6557, specifically related to Section 3(b), it says to consult with both the collaborative and castle, I would love for something to be added in there to consult with the best practices and findings of the neuroscience of learning

centers. The centers, both at -- like the Brainwave Learning Center at Stanford, as well as the National Institutes of Health, the Brain Learning Project. The reason I bring that up is that neuroscience is way ahead of where a lot of our organizations are in this country, and what they can provide and insights that you can provide to us as educators should be woven into the fabric of this Bill.

Next, cost. For every \$1 spent on social emotional learning, Columbia University has shown a community, a state gets seven to \$11 return. It's been shown by Columbia because it raises academic scores, improves dropouts and school suspension rates, reduces incidents of school violence, as well as strengthen community cohesion.

Scores, standardized test scores rise as a byproduct of SEO programs. If you want a specific article go to Child Development, January/February 2011. There they did a meta-analysis around-

DALLAS EMERLE: Chris, you're at two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

CHRISTOPHER KUKK: Thank you. 213 school-based social emotional learning programs. 11% of point gain in achievement occurred. In short, Commander Spock of Star Trek was wrong. Emotion and social emotional development is the foundation for logic, rationality, and academic success. I support House Bill 6557 with the addition of including the work of the neuroscience of Learning Centers and or Institute's, thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Christopher. And, you know, don't talk so bad about my Trekkie. Dr. Spock.

CHRISTOPHER KUKK: Kirk had it more right, though.  
Kirk had it more right.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So what was the 2011 issue  
that you were talking about? That you  
mentioned?

CHRISTOPHER KUKK: Sure. It's from the journal  
Child Development. It's the January/February  
2011, Volume 82, No. 1, pages 405-432. The  
Impact of Enhancing Students Social Emotional  
Learning, and it's a meta- analysis of 213  
school-based programs.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank I just wrote  
that down so I can get that -- I can get back  
to that. Thank you. I don't see any  
questions. No hands raised. So thank you so  
much for your testimony. I'm going to try to  
go back to John Murphy. If john, you're on. I  
see your name, but I don't know. I don't know  
if you were able to fix your internet problem.  
John Murphy. Okay, so I'll move on. Let me  
move to Jan Hochadel. Is Jan there. No, Jan,  
from AFT Connecticut. Okay, I'll move on to  
the next Cynthia Ross. Cynthia Ross Zweig.

CYNTHIA ROSS ZWEIG: Hi.

REP. SANZCHEZ (25TH): Cynthia, there you are.  
Okay.

CYNTHIA ROSS ZWEIG: Thank you. My name is Cynthia  
Ross Zweig, and I'm a para-educator in New  
Fairfield and President of the Para-educator  
Council of CSCA, SEIU Local 2001, and I am  
speaking in support of House Bill 6557,  
specifically Section 17 and 18. Today you will  
hear many examples of the work para- educators  
are doing across the state from teaching a  
student to use utensils in a cooking class, to  
para-educators who are advisors in book clubs  
and Student Council, teaching our students to



learn to be part of a community. Teaching a student to button or zipper or walk down a hall without being afraid of noises. Working with a student who says I don't understand what I'm doing. I don't know how to write this paper, help me. I'm afraid I'll fail. Each taking the extra time to explain and watching the students succeed.

Since 2006, the Connecticut Superior Court has made rulings regarding inequalities in the education system. Ruling it was up to the legislators to set the standards of education adequacy. Para-educator inadequacy across the state is prevalent. There are no state sets standards only recommendations. There are 15,000 approximate para-educators in Connecticut and are predominantly women. We are proud of the critical role they play in educating our state's children. But despite the important work they do, they are often paid at or slightly above minimum wage, with little or no guarantees for training, pay or career development. And because of the dedication to the students, and despite the low pay and lack of training and benefits, paras are putting on their PPE and work directly with students, many of whom have special needs in the classroom. Our students, schools and para-educators of Connecticut deserve better.

The question is always what's in the best interest of the child. Ensuring every child in every town has teachers meeting standard requirements that are mandated by States, supports the best interest, but there is another critical position in the classroom. It is the para-educator that works most closely with those students having an IEP or 504 plan, often functioning as a deliverer of OT, PT, and educational modifications outlined by certified staff.

During these pandemic times, para-educators are acting as substitutes, all while still supporting their assigned students. The question that Section 17 and 18 of House Bill 6557 addresses is, should there be a study to help set standards for this vital contributor in the education system. Shouldn't part of those standards be reflected in the qualification of those employees who work with students needing the most support with regard to social emotional wellbeing and learning disabilities? The para-educator role in Hartford may not even have the same guidelines, or even the same name, as in Danbury or New Fairfield. Ensuring standards and base guidelines allows para-educators to consistently provide the best support possible to our students. Connecticut is a national leader when it comes to education with, some of the finest public schools in the country. Let us leave with the most trained, highly qualified staff on all levels consistently across the state. I ask you to vote in support of House Bill 6557. Thank you for hearing my testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much, Cynthia. I have a question here from Representative Callahan.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Cynthia, it's good to see you. Thank you for taking the time to take the day off of work and testify, most likely -- most likely without pay. I would -- I just have a follow up question for you. In 6557, what would the -- what's the difference this Bill can make? And do you think that the Para Advisory Council would probably be the best -- this best body to make recommendations to the legislature?

CYNTHIA ROSS ZWEIG: Thank you. I think consistency and education by training and setting standards for all para-educators would allow greater support to students with the most highly qualified staff. And I think the school para professional Advisory Council is the ideal body to develop-led legislative recommendations for para-educators as far as training and career development standards pay benefits, because it has a good balance of frontline paras and education policy experts. And I think all of those people working together would be a great benefit to students and staff alike.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you. And I do believe that that you make some very good points. And I do recognize that the Paras are such a huge benefit to our students across the state. And I do really appreciate you coming to address our Committee today. Thank you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA ROSS ZWEIG: Thank you, Pat.

REP. SANCHEZ: (25TH): I guess that's the only question we have on the board. So thank you, Cynthia, for the work you do. And absolutely, I look forward to this Bill going through the Committee to the House floor. Thank you.

CYNTHIA ROSS ZWEIG: Thank you for your time.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, I have Allyx, I hope I'd say this right Schiavone?

ALLYX SCHIAVONE: Schiavone.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Schiavone, okay, sorry.

ALLYX SCHIAVONE: No worries

You're next.

ALLYX SCHIAVONE: Thank you. As you -- as you just heard. My name is Allyx Schiavone. I'm the Executive Director of Friends Center for Children an early care and education program, serving children ages three months to six years in New Haven. Thank you for the opportunity today to support Bill 6558. So I have three minutes to tell you why this Bill is critical three minutes to condense 245 years of the early care and education system into something coherent. So let's think about -- think about it in terms of past, present future.

Past. The early care and education infrastructure is based on a sexist and racist system. It began with women of color watching white women's children. It was women of colors work, and then it became more systematized and it was just considered women's work. And as such, it is devalued. Racist and sexist sentiments became woven into the fabric of the industry. And it is why a workforce that is 98% female is paid on average \$26,000 per year for full time work. And why that same workforce is stratified with a predominant number of head teachers who are white, and assistant and support teachers who are women of color. It is broken, we are paying women to live in poverty, we are reinforcing sexism and racism every time we have to beg for our value, our professionalism, our wages.

Present. There is nothing more important with regard to life outcomes and high quality early care and education. We know this because of scientific awareness that surrounds brain development. 90% of a child's brain develops by age five, a newborn has all the brain cells they'll have for the rest of their life. But what makes the brain work are the connections between those cells. Early care and education teachers in high quality programs know how to

foster those connections. We also know the critical influence high quality early care and education has on life outcomes thanks to the work of Nobel Prize Winner Professor James Heckman. For every \$1 Connecticut invests in high quality early care and education there's a \$13 return on investment and that compounds. That is a tremendous return on investment, the fact that we ignore both the individual child and societal benefits of high quality early care and education by underfunding it is a testimony to how deeply rooted our societal prejudices are against women and children.

Future. Bill 6558 begins to shift past and present in equities toward towards a more equitable future. Establishing a student loan forgiveness program and a personal income tax credit for the early care and education workforce begins to offer some of the-

DALLAS EMERLE: Allyx, you're two minutes 30 seconds. If you don't mind summarizing.

ALLYX SCHIVONE: Sure, begins to offer some relief to the women who are currently underfunded, undervalued and overburdened by a system that has failed them. Expanding eligibility and the CARE for Kids program and preventing families seeking employment to participate in state-funded programs begins to offer some relief to families who rely on that system. Establishing a Taskforce concerning early childhood educator licensing and workforce development creates the opportunity for an adjusted pathway, one that could reimagine how early care and education workers are trained, valued, and compensated. This step is critical because what we are doing now relying on a broken, racist, sexist system is giving us exactly what it is designed to do a broken racist, sexist system. Thank you for your time. And I appreciate the opportunity to share my support.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much, Miss Schiavone, for your testimony. I don't see any questions or any hands up. So thank you. Thank you for submitting your written testimony as well. Thank you. Next we have Virginia DeLong.

VIRGINIA DELONG: Yes, good afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25): There you go. How are you?

VIRGINIA DELONG: Here I am. Good afternoon Committee Chairs esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Virginia DeLong. I am a Director of School Counseling at a Technical High School. I am Chairman of the Government Relations and Advocacy Committee for the Connecticut School Counselor Association. And I'm the 2020 Connecticut School Counselor of the year. And I'd like to thank you for the opportunity today to testify and House Bill 6557. AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

I have submitted written testimony. So I'm not going to read off that today I'm just going to talk to you about my experiences as a school counselor, particularly this year, and why this Bill is so important for you to consider and take a look at passing this year has been hard. It's been hard for me as an educator for my fellow educators and for parents, but in particular, it has been hard for our kids. Our students are falling apart. You know, we have kids who are thriving in this model and doing really well. But the majority of our kids are having a really difficult time. They are facing food insecurity is at home parents who are losing jobs. They are having financial hardships as a result, technology issues, engagement issues, you name it, it's probably

there and it's all impacting their social and emotional health.

So this is obviously increased anxiety and depression among our students, I can tell you that that's what we're dealing with every day down in my office. I am fortunate to work in a school that does have pretty good ratios. But we are still dealing with a lot of students would need. I can tell you that the social worker, school counselors and school psychologists that I know we are all working with all fire cylinders fired every day all the time, I go home. So mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted every day, that I'm literally using my weekends to catch up, sleep, and rejuvenate to start all over again on Monday. It is exhausting. Our kids need to be back in school. And I hear that all the time because of their social emotional health. But if we send them back to school without the proper supports in place, we are being incredibly irresponsible. I know there are other Bills that talk about the gaps in learning that we need to address. But I can honestly tell you that you are wasting your time putting plans into place to address those gaps. If you're not also going to consider the social and emotional health of our kids. Our kids need to Maslow before they can bloom, meaning they need to be able to take care of those social emotional needs before they're even going to be able to absorb anything academic.

We have huge inequities in this state, particularly in our urban districts. All students in the state do not have access to a school counselor. 25% of our elementary schools have school counselors, that means 75% do not. So kids don't have access to that. You know, we need to make sure-

DALLAS EMERLE: You're at two minutes 30 seconds.

VIRGINIA DELONG: Thank you. We need to make sure that we are addressing the needs of every single student in the state. I am so pleased I've been I actually am straddling meetings right now, while contributing a school counselor. And I do admire your being able to sit through all of these testimonies, my lights just went off. So today because it's a lot, and this is what our students deal with on a daily basis, but I just want to leave you with one thing that our recent Secretary of Education, Dr. Cardona recently said, and he said, this is not just about turning on the lights, not just about unlocking the doors and letting students in. This is about recovering and making sure we are providing that important social emotional development and support our students' need off -- after experiencing a trauma like we just faced. This has been an incredibly traumatic event for our students. And we need to make sure that we are addressing the whole child if we want our students to be successful when they return to school. So thank you for the opportunity to speak today. And I'm always happy to answer questions on the role of the school counselor or anything else you may have questions on.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. DeLong, for your testimony. I don't see any hands raised at the moment. So thank you so much for your testimony.

VIRGINIA DELONG: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have -- let's see, I have Bianca Shinn. Is Bianca in? I don't see Bianca, okay. Shelli-Lynn Nolan. I don't see Shelli-Lynn Nolan. Okay, Megan Osimanti, Megan Osimanti. One more time Megan. Megan Osimanti, I see you popped up but I can't -- we



can't hear you. Megan Osimanti, I can see you but I can't hear you. Okay, looks like she's having technical difficulties. We can't hear you. Okay, I'll move on -- I'm going to move on to the next person. Rakshita.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: Hello.

SENATOR SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: Okay.

SENATOR SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi, you have the floor.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: Hello, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee. I have special greetings for Senator Miller, Representative Fiorello, Representative Leeper, and Representative Devlin. They represent our interest in Stamford and Fairfield. My name is Rakshita Ramakrishna and I am a member of the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, which is a student activism organization at Stamford High School. I'm testifying today in support of Senate Bill 977, which is about virtual learning, and House Bill 6557 which is about social emotional learning.

I'm testifying on behalf of my program and our student allies in Norwalk in Fairfield. I will summarize our written testimony. I will talk about Senate Bill 977. First, while virtual learning has benefits for some, it has a long way to go before it becomes a powerful and equitable platform of learning for all. The Bill with its call for uniform training standards for teachers is a good start, but we have a suggestion to make it stronger. We suggest the Committee amend the Bill to include student privacy and data protections in every audit of virtual learning, and to require it as

one of the uniform training standards for teachers.

Generally speaking, school districts do not proactively tell their students about their right to privacy and data protections. For many students that right to privacy became an issue when school districts implemented a camera-on policy at the start of the pandemic for remote learners. To this day, the camera-on policy, which has exposed students' lives like never before, has left a trail of unanswered questions about student safety, equity and right to privacy.

In 2019, the Connecticut student privacy Taskforce called for the creation of a quote, "common store of student privacy training materials for teacher." Unquote. If that material had been available to school districts across the state in March 2020, students and teachers might have been allies in the design and rollout of a camera-on policy that both protected students' privacy and supported teachers as they navigated the challenges of virtual learning. In fact, including student privacy and data protections in Senate Bill 977, as a required professional development topic will pave the way for increased understanding of students' lives, promote student engagement and digital citizenship, support good school governance and increased appreciation for the impact that school policies may have on students' rights to privacy.

The second Bill we support is House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING, I direct you to our written comments about mental health screenings for students. I

DALLAS EMERLE: We appreciate you. You're at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you don't mind summarizing.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: As well as our revisions to the section on training for school resource officers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much for your testimony. I don't see any questions. Okay, well -- oh, we do have one, Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Actually, I see my Ranking Member. Shall I let Representative McCarty go first?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, you can go first.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you. Thank you, Representative Fiorello. I'll be very quick, it's really more a comment, I just wanted to thank you so much as we continue to work on these proposals to bring up the aspect of student privacy. And that we take a look at that as we continue to work on what we're doing with virtual learning going forward. So I just really wanted to thank you for bringing that suggestion for it.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Great, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you so much, Rakshita, so nice to meet you on Zoom. And thank you for the points that you bring up. I wondered if you could take a few minutes to just tell us a little bit more about what Virtual Learning was like how, you took your tests, how you submitted your homework, and I would love to understand that a little more. And then what do you mean by data protections?

I understand the privacy point. Thank you so much.

RAKSHITA RAMAKRISHNA: Okay, thank you. So virtual learning currently, Stamford is doing hybrid. So we go to school one day, and then we have remote learning another day. Tests are usually -- before we transitioned to hybrid, we would take them online. But now that we're in hybrid, usually we take them in school. In terms of student data, we mean like the data they're submitting to the school, their records, that sort of stuff, and privacy of course is -- that was made clear.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): All right. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony. We're going to move on. I see that I have Megan Osimanti, are you back? Are you back on are you able to connect? Megan. Okay, so moving on, Ann Greene. Is Ann Greene present? Okay, Syeita Fisher, no? Okay, Jennifer Jacobsen.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Good afternoon, I'm on.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Yeah. Hi, everyone. Good afternoon, dear Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. I've submitted a written testimony, comprehensive testimony on House 6557 and Senate Bill 977 today, so I'll really point you to that. So I'm just going to touch on some highlighted points. I also am a member of a Board. So just in transparency purposes, I am a member of Board of Education. So some of this speaks from that lens as well.

For 6557, I do implore you that the time between the surveying leaves time for the addressing of the

results of that surveying, and I address that in the testimony. The effective date for 6557 of July 1st, 2021, I think we all know that our boards of education budgets have left the table already, and that the staff is not in those budgets at this time. Not to mention the complications that we will have with every district trying to find and fulfill this staff at all exactly the same time. And while I obviously support, you know, social emotional learning and the needs for the staff at this point, this is a dramatic increase in staff that we don't have. So we're going to be looking at a multi-million-dollar deficit in your towns and in the budgets.

And the applicability of it, I've noticed its theme this year and the Bills that we're talking about local and regional education, but we're not including charter schools, magnet schools, Connecticut Technical High School System, and all forms of public schools. So it's just a question that I had on your applicability standard. The accountability metric, I really appreciate interim commissioner's testimony earlier on the appropriateness of that, but also just technically speaking, in order to amend our accountability index requires the US Department of Education approval for state approval. Also, the definition of school connectedness in this Bill, I didn't see a definition of that. And I think that just some early indicators are telling us that on the next Bill, that we're having some issues on that, so be looking for actual definition of what you mean by that. And then also there is about the evaluation piece, because the language in here on holding districts accountable for this and that and the other thing in these Bills while removing the evaluation, so just confused on -- on that piece of it.

Moving on to 977 in virtual learning Bill. This audit is incredibly important. However, the indicators that you've included in Section 3 are all has-beens. What everyone did back the last year, while you may want to look at that, I've included in my testimony, a long list, of indicators. It appears that if we're going to evaluate, that we need to look at results and impact. And not only results in impact to our teachers and our educators, but to the workforce to graduation to drop out to FEL, to isolation to all of these things--

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt Jennifer, you're at two minutes 30 seconds.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Okay, so I would implore you to actually do a comprehensive audit. Before we go codifying something that we haven't looked under the hood yet. SBE did set standards, where they met. So I'm happy to take any questions. But again, I've included that -- everything in my testimony. So thank you so much for looking at these issues. And they're incredibly important to our kids and our communities right now.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. Jacobsen, for your testimony. I don't see any questions. No hands raised. So I'm going to be moving on to the next person. Well, thank you so much for your testimony.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next I have Kate Dias. Kate, I see you there. Kate.

KATE DIAS: Good afternoon, Members of the Committee. My name is Kate Dias. You guys are freezing on me. All right. Hopefully, that's good now, you haven't frozen once until now.

I'm here today to testify as a teacher of math at Manchester High School, and also as the President of the Manchester Education Association. I'm talking about Senate Bill 977. With regard to virtual learning. I think a lot of what our previous speakers have mentioned about concerns with virtual learning are going to be repeated over and over again. This was not a choice that we've made and said, let's do virtual learning. And it wasn't an intentional platform and the decision we made, it was done out of urgency and out of crisis.

And so part of my concern in this Act is that we really seem to be adopting it, looking at it and saying, here's what we should do, we should move forward with virtual learning, without knowing -- knowing truly if it's an effective, valid learning platform, if it in fact works for all students. If it in fact works for all instructional capacities. So we think the audit is a right place to start, I would agree that I don't think the audit necessarily reflects all of the concerns and considerations that I would like to see reflected. I do think we care greatly about outcome. And we do care -- there were many kids who were able to survive, but is surviving virtual learning enough?

And I think that's part of what we want to really look at, if we're going to look at continuing the practice in a variety of different ways in the future. I know that it was incredibly stressful as a teacher to have feet in both worlds, to be teaching in-person to be teaching online, to transition to have to figure out how to teach math in a virtual platform is really interesting. And while we did what we needed to do and continue to, because that is what teachers do, we rise to challenges, we figure things out. I'm not sure there's a whole lot of us who are willing to say, this is how we

should do education now. And so for me, that's really what the audit has to get into, which is, when is it appropriate? What are the conditions necessary? And what are really the practical limitations because I think we can all agree, there's no coincidence that you're talking about virtual learning and social emotional learning at the exact same time. Because one of the most significant impacts of our virtual learning has been on the social emotional development of students. So I don't think there's a coincidence that those things are happening at the same time.

So I think it would be foolish of us to step forward into codifying and accepting virtual learning as a reasonable practice, I also had a good chuckle about the professional development suggestion, given that this is an entirely new field. And you either have the people who have been doing it and struggling—

DALLAS EMERLE: Kate, you're at two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

KATE DIAS: Thank you. But we have the people who have actually been doing virtual learning, and those who have been thinking about virtual learning, and I don't think there are any experts in the field that can really give us the professional development, we would need to execute it as an extensive learning model.

So I think it really is a-proceed-with-caution is what I would say, really look carefully at the language and the expectations of what we really want from school districts. Because I do not think that a virtual learning model is a good, consistent model for kids. Thank you so much to all of you. I appreciate your time and your willingness to dedicate so much energy to hearing what all of us teachers and families have to say.



REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much for your testimony today. I don't see any hands up. So I'm going to move on to the next person. Thank you so much. Just to remind people, if you're not in the waiting room, and we call you, you will have to wait to the end. Because it's not fair to others that are in the waiting room and ready to go. So I'm calling next, Glenn--

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: Sorry to interrupt, but I was in the waiting room when you -- when you called my name. So I'm wondering if I could go, I apologize. But I was in a waiting room waiting to be let in. When you caught my name. This is Syeita Rhey-Fisher, No. 61.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay, but I just wanted to remind you, I called people's names at least two to three times. So I will let you go. But I can't go back to people that other people are waiting. So you'll you're next.

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that. Good evening, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name Syeita Rhey-Fisher. I'm an elementary teacher and a parent of three elementary aged children attending Hartford public schools, which is why I need to go, because I got to pick them up.

I am here testifying in support of Bill House Bill 6556. The pandemic has brought to light racial issues that have existed and persistent long before COVID for black and brown families. I'm asking you to clearly name and defined student engagement in this Bill as a separate entity from student attendance to track measure and report. This will allow schools and the state to gather concrete data on how to address learning loss and best serve our students. My school qualifies for 100% free and reduced

lunch. In my experience, before collecting engagement data in addition to attendance, students were more likely to be detached in class challenges that I face for students who logged on and were counted. As president for attendance included them being easily distracted by things in their home environment. Students in attendance for some content areas but not others. Students being away from their videos, students babysitting younger siblings, students physically present in front of the screen, but then engaged in other activities in different tabs.

So in addition to investing in programs such as [inaudible] we've been tracking students' work completion scores for every class. To help measure engagement, again, separate from attendance, teacher Select Yes, which equates to 100%, no 0%, or partial 50%. But each student's named after each class or by the end of the day to indicate if work was completed. At the close of the week, the calculated average is sent to parents along with comments. For students under a certain percentage. This has been effective because I've been able to measure growth discern patterns in student work behaviors, across content, I've been able to celebrate them which they've soaked up that affirmation and communicate new goals to them and to the parents.

Also, partnering with parents has been so much easier because of the transparency, I can better articulate to them how their children are doing. They're aware of issues right away and not at the end of the marking period when it may be too late for them. They understand how the distractions, babysitting and other elements mentioned above has impacted their children's learning, and then they do adjust appropriately. And we are also able to

determine what is needed on our end as a school to help better support them.

As a result of my school tracking attendance and engagement distinctly student output in my class has improved significantly, I have math or reading--

DALLAS EMERLE: Excuse me, you're two minutes 30 seconds, if you don't mind.

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: Thank you. Illustrating the 100% of student engagement. And students have still managed to grow one to three levels of reading despite pandemic as measured by our latest reading step test. So tracking attendance, as it currently stands is not enough. Our children can't afford for the equity gap to be further exasperated. So as a resident, a teacher, and more importantly, as a minority parent, I'm asking you to please consider the amendments proposed here today regarding student engagement. And this Bill as well. Thank you for your time.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much. And you did submit written testimony correct?

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: I did not. But I will.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay, please do so.

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: Absolutely.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. I don't see any questions here. So I'll be moving on to the next person. Thank you so much.

SYEITA RHEY-FISHER: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next is -- let's see, Glenn Lungarini. Hi, Glenn.

GLENN LUNGARINI: Good afternoon. Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory. Ranking Members, Representative McCarty, and Senator Berthel, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. As the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools in the Connecticut Interscholastic Conference. I represent approximately 1000 public and parochial, elementary, middle, and high schools in Connecticut. CAS/CIAC supports a wide range of activities, both academic and athletic. I am testifying this afternoon in support of several raised Bills.

First, CAS/CIAC supports the importance of Senate Bill 976. And the Taskforce established within. CAS/CIAC appreciates its inclusion on this established Taskforce. We look forward to collaboratively working with Connecticut's education leaders to examine strategies that will significantly enhance our state's special -- Special Education provisions and funding. CAS/CIAC also supports House Bill 6557, which implements the work of the social emotional learning and school climate collaborative. A workgroup on which I am honored to be a member.

The ongoing dialogue within the ACL and school climate collaborative demonstrates how committed each leadership group around the table is to providing the absolute best education experiences to our students. Much of our work in this collaborative has focused on the changes that are necessary in statewide structures and local education frameworks to address growing social emotional needs of our students and equity within our school systems.

House Bill 6557 addresses social emotional learning, and a matter that will drive change. CAS/CIAC believes that we must reimagine educator evaluation to support principals and implementing innovative pedagogical practices,

and school culture designs that inspire our teachers as well as our students.

We must repurpose the use of pressure of standardized testing so that it becomes meaningful tool for educators and students that drives learning experiences beyond individual limits. while providing structured support. We must develop standardized curriculums that infuse social emotional learning skills in all content areas to reduce the equity divide that continues to negatively impact Connecticut students.

And finally, we must measure the success of our work in terms of the meaningful relationships developed amongst our professionals and students, and the contributions that each stakeholder has made beyond his or her personal gains. When we reach our students hearts, we can teach their minds anything. The system that drives individuals to contribute toward the attainment of their neighbors' goals, as much of their own will be one that produces exceptional academic achievement and sustainable cognitive, physical, social, emotional wellbeing.

CAS/CIAC supports House Bill 6557's purpose of addressing the social emotional needs of our children by implementing the recommendations of the SEO and school climate advisory collaborative. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you this afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Glenn. I don't see any hands raised. Okay. Thank you so much for your testimony and for the work you do. Next I have Diane Willcutts.

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Yeah, Hi. Hi. I'm here on behalf of Special Education Equity for Kids. I'm looking specifically at Senate Bill --I was

going to say 976 or 967 976. Sorry about that. And we strongly support Section 1 related to the technical schools. You know, as you know, it's been really difficult for students with disabilities to be admitted to technical schools, to stay in technical schools based on their Special Education needs. This eliminates that discriminatory piece.

At the same time, there's still language in there that is problematic. So line seven to nine of the current Bill says that the state board of education will determine the appropriateness of the technical education and career school for the educational needs of each such child with a disability, that needs to go. I think it may have been left in as an oversight. Because the seriously problematic language is gone. This is just another piece of it.

And because we wouldn't want the State Board of Ed making -- unilaterally making a decision about the appropriateness of the program for the child with disabilities. And in fact, parents of children with disabilities have the right to place their children in technical high schools. So the same should be true for parents of students with disabilities. A real big concern for us is Section 2 of 976, which establishes another Taskforce to study issues related to the funding of Special Education. We strongly oppose this.

It isn't just that the task force is very school side-focused and doesn't reflect families of children with disabilities. It goes well beyond that. Basically, Special Education was created to meet the needs of students with disabilities, we have to provide a free and appropriate public education. The programs are individualized to the students. So if you put cost first, you're basically undermining the whole piece of the law. And I can give you an

example of why this doesn't work. For example, I may have a student with dyslexia. And that student with dyslexia may need Orton Gillingham instruction, the schools may actually have an Orton Gillingham certified instructor. If they provide one on one instruction, it's effective—

DALLAS EMERLE: Diane, you're two-and-a-half minutes.

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Okay, thanks. If they provide it in a group of five, it's not effective. Now, if that student is provided their instruction in a group of five, and it doesn't work, they then need a private placement. So, you know, so it's just really misleading to look at cost and provision of, you know, in its own isolated silo. So, yeah, so with that being said, Section 1, good job, Section 2, please get rid of it. And SEEK is always here to work with you however you'd like.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Any Members? No, I don't see any. Thank you again for your testimony, Diane.

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Okay, thank you. Thanks.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): let's see. Let me call the next one. I have Alexander Hoffman. Alexander Hoffman. Okay, Veronica Hildalgo. Veronica Hildalgo. Okay, Smita Arora. Smita Arora. Okay, then we'll go to the next one. Curtis Darragh

CURTIS DARRAGH: Yes. Hi, how are you?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi Curtis, you have the floor.

CURTIS DARRAGH: Excellent. Thank you so much. All right, Representatives, Senators, and the Education Committee. Thank you so much for

having me. My name is Curtis Darragh on the floor, and I am a school counselor in the Danbury public schools and the very proud middle school level Liaison for the Connecticut School Counseling Association. I also happen to be one of the nominees for the 2021 School Counselor of the year. Thank you for the opportunity of the offer the strong testimony of this support of House Bill 6557 AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING. This House Bill addresses the social and emotional needs of our students and highlights the needs for more school counselors, school social worker, school psychologist and our schools. Specifically, it calls for school districts, we have at least one school counselor for every 250 students. It also requires the Board of Education to implement comprehensive school counseling programs in their schools, as well as at least 80% of the school counselors' time spent in direct service of their students. How awesome is that? as a practicing school counselor for the past six years, my career has increased with difficulty for our growing population here in Danbury, increasing caseload and educational demands as well as our strong ESL population.

Now with a school counseling framework, I'm afraid that my 375 students will not get an equitable school counseling curriculum that needs the academic, social, emotional and college and career standards in the school year. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the mental health needs in many of our children across all backgrounds. The 2021 school year has been a year like no other with many difficulties, and school counselors like me are doing the best that we can. I'm already planning for the 2022 school year to be filled with students catching up, finding routines, getting organized, connecting emotionally and socially with others.



The mental health that has affected many of our students can - can, and has led to suicide ideations. I can't tell you how many times I've been meeting with students and I have either a line or that one student that really wants to come see me and I have to tell them to wait. Because of all the other responsibilities with my high increased caseload and demanding needs. The 1:375 ratios is not ideal in the Danbury public schools and other cities in the state of Connecticut. Missing that one student is one of my biggest fears. And this Bill will help school counselors across the state because all students in Connecticut deserve the right to an access to a Connecticut school counselor. We rank 37 in the country for our average school counselor ratios. And as of 2019, the ratio was 1:457. That is not ideal for us to know about every single one of those students and bring out those strengths and our students and turn those weaknesses into strengths. Students who are on Honor Roll at times may need that trusted adult that can go to go to their building. With the credit requirements being 25 credits in most high schools, when it comes to scheduling our students. They need those--

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you're two minutes 30 seconds, if you don't mind summarizing.

CURTIS DARRAGH: Thank you. These types of meetings create bonding and trust and relationship building within our four walls. If you're going to give students -- if you're going to give me students, you can bet I can bring up the best of those students and get to know every single one of those students whose names were recognized and we can train we can we know about mental health concern. So let school counselors do this, we are vital to this ever

changing -- global world of education. School counselors are needed now more than ever in Connecticut, I come here representing and speaking for all the beauty and middle school population of grades six through eight are on and on behalf of CISCA and on behalf of Danbury, I'm really happy to work with the Education Committee and anyone else who has ways to write -- to provide long term planning for education for school counselors in Connecticut. Thank you so much for your time and consideration and really happy to be here today. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Curtis. So, First, I would like to say congratulations on your nomination for student counselor of the year. And let me ask you this question. I asked this question earlier to another counselor, and that is, how much time do you actually spend working with students and their families versus doing other types of, you know, work like attendance or what--

CURTIS DARRAGH: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for bringing that question up. I like to spend most of my time with students during the day, I'm also embedded into our, into our schedule to teach a class to our eighth graders that are --a curriculum that connects with the Oscar standards as well to meet social emotional and college career standards for our students, so it's very nice to get out of my office and like, you know, teach to a group of students and provide also small group on whether it comes to executive functioning skills, or grief or divorce group or kids who just really need that little TLC every single day with a nice little lunch bunch and just catching up with a trusted adult that they can feel and catch up with.

So I like to really spend my day I would probably say, 90% of my day with students and the paperwork. You know, I can take care of that later. And, you know, I'm probably one of those people who like, Alright, I'll just take care of it after school because my time for those students is needed during the school day, and I'm going to do that. And I'm going to bring out those strengths. And I'm going to get to know every single one of my students. And you know what I know 375 of their names right now. But I can tell you it to be a little bit more easier for me as I get older, to get to the 250. But that's how I perceive my job. And that's how I want to strengthen all the other Middle School people, and all school counselors in the state of Connecticut to do that, and have that passion for it. And when you find something you love, it doesn't feel like work. And I'm really happy to say that.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much. Thank you. Because, you know, you hear a lot from other counselors that say that their public schools - - well, you know, their administrations don't allow them to spend as much time with their students. But it sounds like you're spending quite a bit of time with your students. And that's great to know.

CURTIS DARRAGH: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Scheduling all these eighth graders for their high school courses. I'm all like, let's have a conversation. Let's get you ready. Let's get excited. If we're doing it virtual, we're meeting in person at six feet apart. Let's get you pumped and excited for high school.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Right. Thank you so much. I don't see any questions for you. So thank you so much for your testimony.

CURTIS DARRAGH: Thank you, Representative. Take care, guys.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Take care. Next. I have Hamish MacPhail.

HAMISH MACPHAIL: How you doing? Hamish MacPhail.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you go. How are you?

HAMISH MACPHAIL: Doing? Well, how are you doing?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Good.

HAMISH MACPHAIL: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Hamish MacPhail, as I said, and I'm the Policy and Research Director for ConnCAN. Today I'm here to support -- testify in support of House Bill 6556, 6557, 6558 and Senate Bill 977. But today, I'll focus primarily on House Bill 6556.

So House Bill 6556 is a great opportunity to accelerate student growth and improve student outcomes, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. And here's why.

First, we have to measure the size, shape, and location of learning loss before we can do any mitigation strategies. And right now, the Bill provides it through mastery exams, but it's also possible through consistent formal and informal assessments that educators use to support students and their families. And then also, there's an opportunity to measure and understand student engagement, not just student attendance, and I'll touch on that in a minute. Secondly, using the insights from -- based on the measures of student learning needs, and understanding community demand and the available funding, we have to develop strategic

mitigation strategies. And that includes a lot of the things that are said in the Bill, which include tutoring, after school programming, summer programming and in school interventions. And those are a great start. But we should also consider other more out of the box ideas like direct payments to families, for education expenses, and informal community-based learning opportunities.

And also on top of that is the we know now that there's going to be three rounds of funding totaling over potentially one and a half billion dollars for Connecticut schools. So we have a lot of flexibility. And there's no time like now to -- to handle some of those more urgent needs. And finally, we have the opportunity to expand our education system to mid and long term. We know that learning loss does not account for the full picture of student progress. Many of our students were behind before the pandemic even started. Our goal should not be to catch kids up so that they're behind. Our goal should be to catch kids up so they're completely and fully prepared for the world ahead of them. We do this by making these mitigation strategies more permanent than just in the short term.

Circling backgrounds through engagement. The Bill seeks to reduce student disengagement a huge issue during the pandemic. However, Connecticut primarily measures engagement by looking at student attendance. Those two are related but are not the same, student attendance and student engagement. If we need to improve student outcomes, we want to measure how they are engaging in the educational process. As a former kindergarten teacher, I know when my shot -- when my student is in school and attendance but not engaged in the lesson just like

in my written testimony I [crosstalk] definition of student engagement. Connecticut student engagement and how Connecticut can accurately measure these for the road ahead. I'm happy to share that with you further. Happy to answer any questions. Thanks so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Next up is Matthew Zabroski

MATHEW ZABROSKI: Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee. My name as you said is Matthew Zabroski. I'm an eighth grade Special Education teacher. I am employed by the town of Glastonbury. I'm here to speak a little bit to Senate Bill 976, concerning Special Education. And specifically, I want to support the establishment of a Taskforce to study issues relating to how special services are provided, as well as funding of Special Education in the state. More specifically, I'd encourage you to investigate the potential need to put a cap on the number of students that a Special Education teacher or 504 plan case manager can have in their caseload.

I've been teaching for 17 years now, in Special Ed. the entire time. And some of the things that I've seen are, caseloads are rising gradually over time. And actually, in some years, they pick a leap. And the one commonality with all these caseloads on all these Special Education and fiber for students is that the more individual attention we can give them, the better the outcomes. Now, essentially in written testimony in there, I pointed out that those outcomes don't just affect the school

community, they affect the community at large. Students with disabilities need to be given the tools and the coping skills to work around their disability, you're not going to get rid of the disability, it's really learning how to manage it. And the more one-on-one attention a student can get, the more likely you are to help them find a way to manage it.

Now, if that doesn't happen, because you've got larger case loads, and you know, the progress has been slow down, you will end up seeing students who graduate high school who have not effectively learned to manage their disability. Now they're out in the community where there's less support. And as a community, we now need to engage more with social services and use other resources to try and assist them, we could actually prevent this by having a smaller caseload in the school community.

Now, I know that we've we're all aware that there's a public health crisis around mental health, specifically with our youth. And this is not getting better, it's getting worse. When you have a case manager for five or four plans, for example, school guidance counselor, you know, 8, 10 years ago, they may have had five or six students with a 504 plan, now they're seeing numbers in the 20s. Well, that means more meetings, that means more time away from students, that means more interaction with -- with teachers and parents to -- to really address all these things. And what it does is it takes them away from their students.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, Mathew. You're two-and-a-half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

MATHEW ZABROSKI: Thank you very much. It takes them away from their students, you know, all the meetings, all the communication, all the

efforts that go on behind the scenes, it takes away during the school day from the students, which is really needed in order to affect change with these young people. So really, in summary, you know, we're -- we already know, we have a mental health crisis, we already know, we have students who are academically behind that's been exacerbated by the pandemic. And at the same time, we've got Special Education, caseloads for kids loads rising, which is really having a negative effect on not just the students who are receiving those services, the school community at large, because any number of people have to attend those meetings, including General Education teachers who are pulled from classes to do that. And then the long term effect is it affects the community as a whole, because now you have people who do not know properly, how to manage their disability.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, we have representative Barry,

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Barry.

REP. BARRY (31ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Zabroski, for being here. And thank you for your advocacy for all -- all students in Glastonbury. Just a quick question, can you briefly tell the Committee how the pandemic affected Special Education and how you're able to meet the needs of those students?

MATHEW ZABROSKI: Sure, it varies. You know, when it comes to Special Education, it's very individualized for students. So to be honest with you, I've seen some students receiving Special Education services who are full remote, even though our district is a hybrid students



and families can choose to be fully remote. We're actually seeing a lot of success in it. And some of them have actually expressed trepidation about going back in school full time. At the same time, other students have really fallen behind and a lot of it has to do with engagement. You know, there are some students who really need to be in person face to face with the teacher to actively engage in the lesson at hand. You know, being able to walk around the room and look over student's shoulder and see that they're having difficulty with what they're writing or what they're reading. It's in those cases, much easier to jump in and assess them, show them you know, different give them different tools, show them different methods to attack, whatever problem they're facing.

So it really is mixed individual per student. Now by and large. You know, are we seeing that most students, especially those receiving Special Education, you know, have missed out on services. I think school districts and teachers have done an absolute incredible job compensating for -- for the current conditions, but for many of the students now there is no, there's no replacement for in person learning, especially when you think about students with more significant needs intellectual disabilities, students who need help toileting, for example. You know, there's, it's been a pretty rough burden on those students and their families, they definitely have missed out.

Now, going forward, they're going to, you know, I think we all understand that some remediation would be helpful. And having a smaller caseload certainly lends itself to that, you know, we're going to be trying to make up for lost time with many of these students. And doing that with -- with current caseload now, I teach in Glastonbury, and we're fortunate that

we have a lot of support. And we compared to other school districts actually have, I guess what you consider reasonable caseload sizes. Again, they've been rising over the years. But I know in some districts, you know, these caseloads of 40 kids or more, and that's, I don't know how they're doing it, quite honestly, and effecting any change with those kids. Ours hover anywhere, it changes by person, but it could be 15 to the mid-20s. And 504 is actually our have been really increasing a lot more over the years. But, you know, looking ahead, yeah, we have a lot of kids who really are going to need some serious remediation. And, you know, how are you going to increase that time? That's a big question. And you can increase the time by making sure that they're smaller caseloads.

REP. BARRY (31ST): Great, thank you. Thank you for your answer. And thank you for being here.

MATHEW ZABROSKI: Thank you. And thank all of you for allowing me to speak today.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No problem. Any other questions from the Committee? Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25th): I don't see any.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Matthew, for your testimony. Appreciate it.

MATHEW ZABROSKI: Thank you all very much. Have a great day. You got a long way ahead of you.

REP. SANCHEZ (2ND): Next, we have Robert Goodrich. Robert, you're ON.

ROBERT GOODRICH: Co-Chairs, Senator McCrory and Rep Sanchez and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Robbie Goodrich. I'm the Executive Director of RACCE

and a member of the Coalition for Equity and Learning. I'm here today to testify in support of House Bill 6556 with amendments. I have some specifics in my written testimony, but I wanted to be able to recap the story of our Coalition.

Now our coalition has conducted an exhaustive process with our partners which include teachers, parents, students, as well as equity and advocacy experts. Now on a monthly basis we've met with see it the CSD and have been able to share experiences, expertise, and recommendations. Our briefs submitted to this Committee into the State Department of Education makes clear our concerns about establishing a sense of urgency standardizing a definition of engagement, applying of assessment data to student engagement, prescribed mitigation strategies and accountability Members. Now, the CSD has, for the most part proven to be a reliable and dedicated partner and providing guidance to districts during COVID-19.

Now in their testimony earlier today, the State Department rejected defining student engagement. And it should be noted that the State Department of Education applied for a waiver from the United States Department of Education that pauses the use of the most important parts of the NextGen accountability system. According to the waiver attendance. According to the waiver, tenant's data can't be collected and used because of the inconsistent application of its own guidance by districts. Therefore, and I quote, it does not lend itself to be included in formal accountability determinations. However, and I quote, again, classroom teachers are expected to utilize student participation to determine and record whether a student is in attendance.

Now, these inconsistencies and contradictions create conditions where racial inequity and education explodes. Now, what we're inviting the Members of this Committee to meet with our coalition, which is made up of 10 member organizations and five ally organizations, to further dive into what and how student engagement should be defined, measured, and implemented on a statewide basis. Now, I'd like to open up for some questions to the Committee. I appreciate your time. Thank you. Great,

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? I have -- I have one on Robert, you said, as far as a definition for student engagement. Did your organization come up with a definition for student -- student engagement? What is it?

ROBERT GOODRICH: So the definition is that it's 75% of time. Okay, I'm going to read it to you though.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

ROBERT GOODRICH: So that the definition is we define engaged in as those who participate in 75% more of learning opportunities in person, hybrid or remote by assigning it to lesson completing assignments or participating in learning test. Engagement is measured by student participation and output. And then we highlight this with the importance of measuring this through the lens of school connectedness, which is defined by the CDC, which the State Department of Education should endorse and apply to the new standards that we're asking for.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for years. And the reason I'm asking is because we know that this Distance Learning Series, there's a number of kids who are not signing or

they're pretty much not engaged. But I read an editorial by a student themselves. And they spoke about the fact that that same kid has not engaged on a computer this is learning is the same kid that comes to school every single day, or pretty much it is not engaged in school, is typically ignored by the teacher, and just goes by flowing through their particular day. And in May a whole lot of sense to me, because that is actual what actually what happens. So when we see a kid not engaged, not turning on a computer, not focused on the lesson. This is not the first time this child had been this way. That child has been amongst us for years. And we have not effectively dealt with them in person. And we're not effectively dealing with them. Why would this be one? And I think that his issue, and I think we should have to come up with a definition of what engagement is even. Especially I teach before from Glasgow, you'd mentioned that yes, many students are coming to school. But that doesn't mean they're engaged in school. So I think the definition is really important. I appreciate the work that you that your Committee is doing. Hopefully, we can get some type of come to an impasse with SD, so we can come up with a true definition of what engagement really looks like. So I appreciate you. The work you're doing any other questions from the Committee?

ROBERT GOODRICH: Senator McCrory, can I add one more thing?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Absolutely.

ROBERT GOODRICH: I think it's very important to identify that the next gen accountability system is a valuable tool. But there is inherent flaw to it, in which that there's not enough qualitative data being collected and analyzed by the State Department of Education that trickles down to every district. That

means that culturally responsive solutions, especially for Black and Brown students, are nearly impossible to calculate and they may be able to be invented, they're not be able to implement be implemented with fidelity.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. I see we have one question from Representative Comey. Representative Comey.

REP. COMEY (102nd): Yes. Thank you, Chairman. Mr. Goodrich, thank you so much for your testimony. I was wondering, do you -- how do you or how are the best practices out there in communities working with parents? How are they sharing the engagement process with parents? I'm, as a parent I'm interested in --in wanting to know what - what different districts are doing and how they're measuring engagement and where we can learn about that. Thank you.

ROBERT GOODRICH: That's a great question. It's one that we've actually asked the State Department of Education several times. I think it's incumbent upon for all of us to accept that when we when we have a weak definition of attendance, which is 50% of any day counts as a full day for a student, added with the pandemic, that we're it's almost impossible to continue to measure actual school conduct as an engagement, no matter what type of interventions, what type of technological sharing is going on between districts and families.

So one of the things that needs to be done is an effort to increase the amount of qualitative surveys introduced to students and families on a daily weekly basis and have that count just as much as the objective standards from the s Back scores, to AP exams, and to be able to value that so there needs to be a concentrated effort and the S02 are to funds, the State

Department should use a portion of those to develop scientific methods to measure how it is that parents and students are connected to school, this is not something that's impossible to do, there just hasn't been enough time tension and resources taken to it. So the best practices are just measuring whether or not students are logging in or not. And we know that's not engagement. So it different districts do it in different ways in different districts do it in better ways. But for sure what Senator McCrory talked about is true that the same students that were disengaged before are the same now.

And this is our time to capitalize on the additional resources, funding and attention being paid to student engagement. So we need to define it first and foremost.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee? Seeing none, we'll go to our next presenter. Thank you again, Robert. We have Alicia Makowski. Alisa, oh there she is. You're on mute. I think you're on mute. Can't hear you.

ALICIA MAKOWSKI: Hi. Can you hear me?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Now, yes I can.

ALICIA MAKOWSKI: You can hear me. Hi how are you?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Good.

ALICIA MAKOWSKI: I apologize. Thank you so much Education Committee Members and thank you, Mr. Chairman for allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 977. I'm a mother of four children, actually, two of them are coming home right now, so I apologize if it gets too loud. I'm a mother of four school-aged children in

Naugatuck. Two are in high school and two in elementary school.

They've had some challenges to distance learning as two of my children have 504 plans and one has an IEP. And the last one is in first grade. It has been an adventure, let me tell you, I count myself fortunate that our district has been in person in some form since last September. But as a mom of Special Needs children, I urge you to create a universal standard for virtual learning. I would also urge for uniformity in those deciding factors that we too going to fully vote virtual for certain -- certain students but not for others. When they're high school with full virtue just before Thanksgiving.

Last year, my two elementary school kids were able to go full time and continue. But my older children were quite depressed. So much so that one of my kids had sweet suicidal ideation. Something that's never been a problem before. We had a very caring staff and Special Ed team that made sure that my child could be present in front of a teacher for four days a week, in a local community room during the end of December as a way to make sure that my child did not become a statistic. I'm extremely grateful for that.

Having a much better idea of what metrics are being used to decide when a school goes fully virtual might help going forward, especially for children who do not deal with transitions well, that's my children. Their grades suffered noticeably during the fully virtual model of the second quarters, grades that were in the 80s and 90s. Suddenly, we're in the teens for second quarter, my high school kids are back in person because that's what their education plan allows. And they're thriving again, let me be clear, I'm extremely grateful to our educators



for their super human actions towards their students this year.

And last, I have no doubt that they are trying their absolute hardest, despite the ever changing roles associated with this pandemic. But to that end, please don't take away all of our snow days, it's extremely hard having four children three of which to have Special Needs at the computer on the snow days is virtually impossible. And they find it extremely tedious, especially the younger ones, it's very difficult to keep them on the computer. And then my older kids have a quest -- they have problems because of the lag in the drain on the conductivity of the combined Google Meets for four kids. Google Classroom is not without its faults, one of which is that needs can be dropped mid class leading to questions from annoyed teachers. And I certainly understand the need to get out of this year with as little disruption as possible. But snow days are a great way for kids to unwind.

DALLAS EMERLE: Hi, Alicia, you're at two-and-a-half minutes please if you don't mind summarizing.

ALICIA MAKOWSKI: Something I suspect that even teachers could use on snow days, please allow us our snow days. And I thank you very much for your time. And I welcome any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, thank you again, Alicia, and appreciate your testimony. Next up, we have Mary Ellen Foley.

MARY ELLEN FOLEY: Yes, hi. Can you hear me?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, followed by Paul Bartomioli, and then followed by Melissa Asare. Sorry, go ahead.

MARY ELLEN FOLEY: I apologize for my, my setting in the car. I'm about to get my vaccine after that. So I'm very excited. But Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Mary Ellen Foley, I'm a senior at Ridgefield High School. And I'm here to speak about Senate Bill 977, AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

Both educators and students have had to adapt to virtual teaching and learning and it was an unprecedented year due to the pandemic. In the years to come, our schools need to focus on both the educational and social emotional needs of our students as they return to in person learning in grades K through 12. The pool experience allows students to be supported as they learn, grow, explore, and develop into their own unique person in their own time. Teachers play a crucial role in understanding the needs of each student. And due to the past year, it is more than crucial that teachers have the time to develop these relationships with students and find out what their specific needs are after a year of very learning experiences in creating the opportunity to learn moving research to practice to close the achievement gap when you get a new era state.

It is essential that educators understand the nature of the gap and why it exists. Absent a clear understanding of the causes of the gap. It is easy for schools to adopt strategies that I Do not work or in some cases even exacerbate the problem. We have a long history in this country of pursuing quick fix reforms, such as computer based learning programs, scripted curriculum teacher proof curriculum that

promise a great deal but often seem to deliver little. Senate Bill 977 is an example of one of these quick fixes, as it attempts to make a general standard for all school districts in terms of Virtual Learning Standards and Training.

Providing a general standard and curriculum assumes all educational settings and students are the same. And we certainly know this is not the case. We're talking about children, not factory generated product that needs to need a quality-control standard. Before creating policies that aim for general fix to the virtual learning experience. I ask that you take the time to review research, talk with educators and students as you are today to hear their experiences about the past and the present. Perhaps school districts have a select group of teachers trained for virtual learning, teaching, and curriculum. As your previous speaker just showed the need for her children. But now is the time for educators to use their hours to have the flexibility to work with their students and focus on their individual needs and continue and keep them moving on a successful pathway. So I thank you for your time and consideration. I also am a mom of a high school student at Ridgefield High School and a middle schooler. So I'm very passionate as a mom, as an educator to help our students, but our teachers need to be working with their kids in the classroom and meeting their needs individually, not hours and hours of professional development to create a one size fits all. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. And, you know, I'll just ask or I'll just make a statement and maybe as a question, and then you can briefly give me a summary.

This is all unique for us because of this pandemic, it is something that we did not anticipate. Virtual owner will be a part of educational experiences, not just in Connecticut, but throughout the country as we move forward. Would you be willing to work with SDE or if we get a working group around virtual learning because, you know, as an educator myself, I don't want this to be a one-trick pony or one size fits all, policy that we make it, and I do want the policy to be something that is meaningful and something that will move our educational system forward.

So, at some point, it looks like we might have to get a working group to figure out what's the best method as we move forward, because virtual learning is here to stay. It's not going anywhere. Yeah. I think we should be at the forefront of it as educators. So that's not a question, just my statement.

And I'm thinking we're going to have to move that way. So, we get - hear the voices of educators, administrators, parents, and children to make sure we put a great policy in place. So, I just wanted to add that. Any other comments, questions from the Committee. Seeing none. We have Representative McCarty?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes. Thank you, Chairman McCrory. And just very quickly to Mary Ellen, I'm just curious because the Department of Education has done a series of webinars to reach out to parents and families. And I'm just curious and should have asked the question, are you aware of those? And I'm just wondering if the districts are helping get that information out, because I think it is a very good platform for parents to work with each other and to hear what's going on in the virtual learning mode and to be able to exchange their stories. So, I'm just curious

as to whether you are aware of those webinars and if you have used them?

MARY ELLEN FOLEY: I have not used them myself. I agree that virtual learning is here to stay and I very quickly adapted to it myself. I don't feel that a lot of people have. So, we do need support for educators. I think parents need to understand. So, I personally was not aware of them nor have I shared them with others, but I do think it's very important to engage everyone and provide the support for both teachers and families at home. But, you know, in specific areas we are needed as opposed to that general, you know, uniform platform.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Right. And I thank you. And in the meantime, while we're working out, all of it was virtual learning, I think it would be good for us to do more to get the information out that, what supports are out there currently for families to use. And so, I'll work on that. Thank you.

MARY ELLEN FOLEY: Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. Any other questions from the Committee. Seeing none. Again, Mary Ellen, thank you for your presentation and we'll move right to Paul next.

MARY ELLEN FOLEY: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Paul, Bartomioli. No Paul. We'll move right ahead. Melissa, followed by Michael Mondello. It's Melissa Asare.

MELISSA ASARE: Hello.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. There you go. You're up, Melissa.

MELISSA ASARE: Well, dear, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Melissa Asare and I'm from Stamford. I'm a parent testifying on behalf of my daughters Alana age 10 who attends Stamford Charter School for Excellence, and Madison age 16 who attends Academy of Information Technology and Engineering.

I'm writing to you today to express my disappointment regarding the Governor's budget on education and my optimism for a better path forward. They're both falling behind because their schools do not offer another resources and support to help them to succeed.

They also have anxiety about being around other people outside of our immediate family. They are like this because they have been in the house for so long and didn't have any contact with other people. It is difficult for them to keep up with their lesson plans when their computer screen freezes, the internet lags, or other types of interruptions.

The Governor's budget, unfortunately does not address the chronic nature of underfunded schools. It seeks to put a band-aid on an issue worsened by COVID. It is not enough. The education budget matters to me, because my children need money to help with these issues. I'm not able to afford tutors and I'm not able to teach them their schoolwork. If they continue with the way things are going, they will not be successful in school.

The government's plan to free state funds for two years and use only federal COVID funds is not enough to help the schools meet the needs of the students. What if the federal funding runs out before their needs are met, what will happen to the children? How will low-income

parents like me get the resources to help our children succeed?

You must reject the Governor's proposed budget for education and pass a budget with a significantly --so sorry, significantly more long-term assistance, systemic support for our schools. There's currently legislation in the education community, SB 948 that helps address these disparities, reducing the state's racial funding gap by 68% and make sure students are at the center of the conversation about education funding.

I'm counting on you to make the right decisions to give all students that fighting chance to excel. If the state contributes to public schools along with the federal funding, the schools will have enough money to meet their children's academic and emotional needs. The more money the schools get, the more they can do for the children who need it most. All children should have what they need to succeed, no matter what their circumstances are.

Please do not freeze state funding for two years. Don't put a freeze on the success of the students who need it the most. Thank you for your time and I urge you to think bolder for the Governor's proposed budget for education.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you --

MELISSA ASARE: Please support --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were done.

MELISSA ASARE: Please support HB 6556, HB 6557, and SB 977. Now I'm done.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Are You sure now? You still got a little more time. Do you want to add anything else?

MELISSA ASARE: No, thank you for listening to me.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No problem. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Thank you again, Melissa. Thank you for your testimony. We're going to move right to the next presenter, Michael Mondello, followed by Marilyn Mathes. Michael Mondello? Okay. I don't see Michael. How about we go to Marilyn. Marilyn, I see you there. Marilyn, you're up next, followed by Marina Rodriguez.

MARILYN MATHES: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Marilyn Mathes. I am testifying today as the mom of a public school, elementary school student. And I have also worked directly with teachers as a staff member of the Connecticut Education Association for the past 14 years. I would like to express my opposition to raised Bill 977, and that of the CEA,

While I recognize that during times of a public health emergency, there may need to be adjustments for safety reasons, there is no true substitute for in-person education. And the implications of this Bill appear to go far beyond a declared public health emergency. Due to fear and concerns about COVID my husband and I opted to have our daughter participate in full remote education this school year

We live in a well-resourced school district that sent devices home with students before schools closed last March. But despite herculean efforts by our daughter's phenomenal teacher and staff, we have seen first-hand that, even in a well-resourced school district with



excellent educators and staff, remote instruction is not the same as in-person education. And despite our concerns about COVID, we intend to send our daughter back to school in-person in the fall.

We have witnessed a number of problems and distractions that have impacted instruction for our daughter, her peers, and her teacher. Our daughter's teacher had to reach out to parents on multiple occasions due to students causing disruptions or distractions by arriving late in the morning or returning from breaks late, shutting off their cameras, not participating, or engaging in other disruptive behavior.

There were also a number of technological issues that interrupted instruction. My daughter was very upset one day when, in the middle of an assessment, she lost connection and couldn't get back into the assessment. I tried to help her, and her teacher patiently tried to help us troubleshoot while simultaneously reassuring my daughter that it would be okay and fielding questions and addressing concerns from several other students simultaneously. Ultimately, we could not fix the problem and had to submit an IT ticket. This is one of several technological issues that my own daughter experienced and many other students had similar problems, all of which took time away from instruction.

I have also seen the toll this year has taken on my daughter's and other students' emotional and mental health, and the stress from remote learning challenges has added to this serious problem.

If we are experiencing these difficulties in a well-resourced district, I can only imagine the additional challenges and inequities --

DALLAS EMERLE: Ms. Marilyn, you're at two and a half minutes, please finish up.

MARILYN MATHES: Thank you. In districts that don't have access to the resources we have. In fact, I've heard a number of concerns raised by teachers about remote instruction in particular in classrooms, where they had to both teach to in-person and remote students simultaneously.

have included in my written testimony some bullets giving examples of those that I won't go into for time now. In short, absent a true public health emergency, public schools should advance and promote the best and most equitable instructional model, which is in-person instruction. There's just no substitute for in-person instruction.

I urge you to consult the experts on this matter, public school educators who can talk about the issues with remote instruction and what is best for educating our students. Thank you for your consideration.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions? Oh, I see Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and just very quickly, I just wanted to point out that I hope CEA yourself that you don't misconstrue the intent of this proposal. It certainly is not meant in any way to take away from in-person learning. We all know that that's the optimal learning environment.

This proposal is being advanced. And so, I just wanted to clear that up because you're not the first person to insinuate that perhaps this was looking to have this as another mode of learning, but we are concerned to have that in

place in the event that we have a situation and unforeseen situation that would rely -- that we would need to rely on virtual learning models.

And I can tell you that there may be some unforeseen circumstance without getting into them today that we really have to be prepared to offer quality education to all of our students. So, there is a purpose for it, but it certainly is not to send the message that we're not all for in-person, the most optimal form of learning. So, I just wanted to clarify that for you.

MARILYN MATHES: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee? Seeing none.

We'll move right along. Thank you very much for your testimony, Marilyn. And we got to move ahead.

MARILYN MATHES: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Marina Rodriguez, followed by Tanis Klingler and then Denise Barret.

MARINA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, esteemed Members of the Committee. My name is Marina Rodriguez. I live in West Haven, Connecticut, and I support the provisions raised in the Bill 6559 that school readiness grants to family childcare educators.

For 25 years, I have worked at various levels with family childcare providers or educators. During today's testimony, I will use the word educator interchangeably with provider. At All Our Kin, the last 10 years, I have worked as an educational coach to many family childcare educators across the state, primarily working in cities like Bridgeport, Hartford, New

Britain, New Haven, and West Haven, just to name a few.

In my years of coaching with educators, I've noticed educators make their professional development, a priority. I've witnessed educators attend more than 25 professional trainings in a year and opt into coaching programs. As we support educators and see them fully for who they are, the qualities they possess in turn, they see children and families fully for who they are and their natural cultural and family context.

Family childcare programs aren't only supportive hubs in their communities, but they are also providing children with disability and consistency and learning experiences, they need not only to thrive in school, but in life. Families seek family childcare programs, as you know, for many reasons, and as Ms. -- as the Commissioner mentioned earlier, because it's close to their home, they offer flexible hours. And my colleague and family childcare educator, Jamila Albasher will enhance on these.

Family childcare programs are worthy of school readiness funds. Experts state that low child to adult ratio and learning environments that provide the opportunity for children to grow together are ecosystems where children build the resiliency they need in life. Family childcare programs offer this to the children they serve.

I have witnessed family childcare programs provide high quality. In practice, it looks like acknowledging a child-parent relationship, narrating transitions for children, setting up a step stool by the window because the children look forward to saying hi to the mail carrier every day and it's a ritual. It looks like a DCF referred child who's had many transitions in their short span of life.

Get to a family childcare program and that program provides the safety of a responsive relationship, nurturing that's consistent and offers also flexibility in the care setting, which, you know, serves as the much-needed buffer for children, that endure these circumstances in life traumas. I've witnessed those transformation personally --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt you. You're at two and a half minutes if you could wrap up.

MARINA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. Over again, in many programs. At All Our Kin, we've helped 48 family childcare educators prepared to obtain their accreditation through the National Association for Family Childcare. Personally, I have -- I've helped 10 of those prepare for their accreditation who's successfully completed it, meeting high quality standards.

A workforce led by women, primarily women of color disproportionately impacted by the marginalization, that systems -- that the systems of oppression create plague with the stereotype of being inadequate places for children, family childcare, educators are not only defying those, but they're also pushing back and on these. But what they're doing is providing high quality learning environments to our most vulnerable families and children changing the course of our nation, one brain at a time.

They not only deserve the recognition for the arduous work they perform, but the families and children, they serve deserve the same funding opportunities and flexibilities as mentioned by Commissioner by earlier today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for listening to me.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Okay. Seeing none. We'll move to the next presenter. Again -- thank you again for your testimony Marina. We have Tanis and then Denise, then Jennifer Farmer.

TANIS KLINGLER: Hello, Chairs and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Tanis Klingler. I'm a resident of Bridgeport, former Connecticut Public School teacher, and a member of the Coalition for Equity and Learning. I submitted my testimony, but I want to speak more about the coalition.

We are community driven coalition fighting to bring equity and learning across Connecticut so that every child has access to a high-quality education. Today, I'm here to testify in conditional support of HB 6556. Our coalition is made up of teachers, parents, grandparents, organizations, community organizers, and community members who care deeply about the students in Connecticut.

Back when this pandemic hit this group assembled because we noticed that our students in the state's largest districts, predominantly black and brown children were not getting the same quality of education as their neighbors. In surrounding affluent suburbs, students were able to go back to learning days after the state shutdown, because they already had internet and devices in their homes, and they were getting synchronous virtual instruction immediately while students in Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, Hartford, and many more places were filling out packets for weeks, some for months.

Well, some schools may have been able to start virtually teaching, too many children never got

a chance to be in a virtual classroom or connect with their teacher for the remainder of 2019-2020 school year. One of the key issues that our coalition has been tackling in this school year is the difference between attendance and engagement.

Well, the state is only held accountable to attendance. It's not enough. We have been meeting weekly as a coalition and monthly with the CSTE to rectify this and do something about it. We are aligned with the spirit of HB 6556 in seeking to mitigate the learning. Yet, it has been an ongoing atrocity that our black and brown students continue to be disadvantaged by inequity and the opportunity gap.

We are worried that the intentions of the Bill will not be able to effectively direct the services and attention where most needed, if engagement is not clearly defined, and data is not collected to respond with resources and strategies to re-engage our students, so they have access to a high-quality education.

Senator McCrory, what you shared earlier, not 20 minutes ago, that when students have their cameras off, now it's similar to the students who didn't, you know, showed up to class, but were engaged. I taught those students. I was a teacher last year and saw the same kids in my physical environment, not engaging in the virtual environment.

So, we need to do better. What we measure is what we value. It's not enough to want kids to be in the classroom with their teacher. We need students engaged in their learning. And if the child is not engaged, we must figure out why and do something about it and hold ourselves accountable to this being what we care about.

Our coalition has worked hard for months with the communities, teachers and families directly impacted to give us input on engagement. So, I submitted to the Chairs in an email, what our student engagement brief includes, what is our definition, what we call on the state to address. We include some ideas for how to collect student level engagement data, and mitigation strategies which are more expansive than the ones included in current Bill language, resource utilization as well.

They are counting on your leadership to do something bold that seeks to eliminate the opportunity gap, which has only grown as a consequence of COVID-19. We invite Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and any Member of the Education Committee who seeks to understand more, to meet with our coalition, to learn more about us, the work we've been doing with the CSTE and specifically discuss what is included in the student engagement brief. Thank you for your time and attention. I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? I have a quick question for you. You said -- first of all, I appreciate the work you're doing in your coalition. Clearly from this public hearing and others, there's a number of coalitions out there that want to do the best for our children. My question to you is do you -- I think you said you came up with a definition of engagement, student engagement.

TANIS KLINGLER: Yeah.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Is that correct?

TANIS KLINGLER: That's right.



SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. And can you just read your definition of student engagement and what does it -- what does it, let me hear it.

TANIS KLINGLER: Yeah. Engage students participate in 75% or more of learning opportunities, whether in-person hybrid or remote by signing into lessons, completing assignments, and participating in learning tasks. Engagement is measured by student participation and output.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Okay. I'll take it from there. All right. Appreciate it. Any other questions? Any other questions from the Committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony. Tanis.

TANIS KLINGLER: Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Denise, followed by Jennifer, then followed by Olivia Rinkes, Rinkes.

DENISE BARRET: Hi. Good afternoon, distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Denise Barret and I teach 9th, 11th, and 10th grade at Richfield or in the Richfield school district. And I'm here to speak about SB 977, AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

So, you know, since last March, just like we all have, I've been teaching in the hybrid learning model where I have kids physically in my classroom, as well as streaming live from my home. And I have to say in the last 10 plus years of my career, this has definitely been the toughest year of my career. Teachers and students have had to take on roles that they've never done before. It's kind of taken a toll on everyone.

Well, virtual learning, yes, has served as a tool to continue teaching throughout this pandemic,

it's definitely not most effective way to be teaching our students. And there have been numerous struggles and challenges that teachers and students have had to deal with, and face throughout this entire year that we have been dealing with pandemic.

The biggest concern or challenge that I have seen this past year has been student engagement. It doesn't matter, you know, how much I may modify an activity or creative I try and be with the lesson, students are just simply not engaged with this virtual learning, especially when they're at home.

Students don't want to talk to each other anymore. They would rather type responses in chat because they're in breakout rooms instead of actually being in a group with one another where they can communicate to each other about their ideas and their thoughts on the activity.

You know, even going in and checking in on these breakout groups, they're just typing instead of actually communicating with one another. The other piece of this engagement is that when kids were at home, they were so easily distracted. I can see his eyes averting the screen and looking down constantly because I know they're texting on their cell phone or they're watching something else in the background and not really paying attention to what's going on in the classroom.

And someone mentioned about cameras, you know, even though it is our district's policy, that students are on cameras at all times, there are many students that do not follow that policy. And, you know, I try and work with the students. I email them, I talk to them about it and find out, you know, what the reason is, but they still aren't on camera. And then that makes me wonder, are they actually paying

attention in class? Are they following along with what I'm doing?

I've had students who don't actually complete the class activity, even though I've assigned it, we'd gone over it and they submit nothing. So, it's very hard, I think for a lot of these kids to be at home while doing school and that for them, the best learning environment is definitely to be in the classroom every day in order to --

DALLAS EMERLE: You've reached your two and a half minutes if you could summarize.

DENISE BARRET: Thank you very much. You know, it's definitely been a challenging year for everybody, but I think, and I feel that, you know, for school to feel like school again, like we have some kind of normalcy is when we have all the kids in the classroom, that way we can actually talk and communicate and, you know, engage with each other as a way a classroom is supposed to feel.

And the last piece is, you know, this year has been even harder on teachers. You know, we have done everything that we're being asked to do and then some, and we're exhausted and we're tired and just, we do -- we want our kids back in the classroom. And, you know, that's where we feel that the children are going to succeed the most is when they are in class, engage with the teacher, having discussions. You know, to me, that's the best kind of environment for our students to be in.

So, thank you very much for listening to me today, and so take into consideration all the testimony that educators are bringing forward to you. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. And I agree that the best type of education we can have is in-person education with teacher and students in the classroom. I concur with that. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none. Seeing none. Thank you for your testimony again, Denise. We have up next Jennifer, followed by Olivia, followed by Erin Pinsky. Jennifer. Jennifer, going once. Jennifer going twice. Jennifer is no longer here. Olivia, Olivia followed by Erin, followed by Heather Gage. Olivia.

OLIVIA RINKES: Thank you. Hello. Thank you, Members of the Education Committee.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Olivia, can you turn your camera on please?

OLIVIA RINKES: Oh, yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I appreciate you. Thank you.

OLIVIA RINKES: I -- it's showing that my camera is on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yeah, you're on. You're fine.

OLIVIA RINKES: Can you hear me?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, yes.

OLIVIA RINKES: Is it okay if I continue without the camera?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I can see you now.

OLIVIA RINKES: Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. All right. Okay, so thank you, Members of the Education Committee. My name is Olivia Rinkes. I'm from North Stonington, Connecticut. I'm testifying

today in support of HB 6558, AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT.

I'm testifying in support of this Bill because an early childhood education is as important as primary and like higher education in providing a foundation for people to like for their futures and to like, for their future careers, so yeah, so in providing a foundation for their future lives and careers. In addition to that, it is also important to provide a place for parents who need childhood care, childcare in order to work and provide a safe shelter for their child and family. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none. We'll move right ahead again. Thank you for your testimony. And we have up next Erin followed by Heather Gage, followed by Tashieanna O'Connor. Erin.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Doesn't look like Erin is on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Erin is not here. Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Heather Gage, followed by Tashieanna O'Connor, followed by Ronald Robeson.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't -- I don't see Heather Gage either.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No, Heather. Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Tashieanna O'Connor?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No, Tashieanna. Okay. How about Ronald, Ronald Robeson? Ronald? Ronald? No, Ronald.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see. No Ronald, no. How about Cathy Lee?

CATHY LEE: I'm here

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right, Cathy, you're up.

CATHY LEE: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Cathy Lee and I'm a CREC Educator.

The essence of teaching is related directly to the creating of relationships between teachers and students. Looking back over the past year, I've been able to have students engage with me online last year because there was no other option and there was already a relationship formed. The same is not true this year. There are many students whom I have never seen or heard because online they will not turn on their camera and they will not have conversations with me, either verbally or through the chat feature of online learning platforms.

We cannot continue learning virtually at both the primary level and secondary level as we do now. Yes, there are students who are excelling but having a one-size fits all approach as we do right now cannot continue. Within virtual teaching, there are the obvious: no eye contact between teachers and students, too many distractions, no true requirement to participate, and not enough critical thinking. But that is just the beginning.

One problem that I have seen who my fellow educators around my school district, state, country, and the world will attest is that it is inhibiting the education of special education students the most. I cannot color code notes, write concrete steps next to problems for students to follow or, as I mentioned earlier, connect with them to create a relationship so that I can better understand how to help them.

I'm required by law to follow a student's individual education plan, otherwise known as an IEP. Usually this would include notes, less problems check-ins and more. I cannot check in with a student when there's little to no communication, no relationship formed. Furthermore, when I speak to my fellow educators, I know that it's not just me who sits upset in the mornings, afternoons and during classes, because all we see are black screens with white names written on them. It is a constant problem for students.

I have seniors now who are not able to graduate with their peers that they've been with for four years, because they have not had internet that is stable enough to have classes on, on a daily basis. I have a freshman who went home after having an A for the first three months of school to now having a D because she cannot learn properly.

This is not fair to students. And while I understand that online learning has been the norm for a long time at colleges, it cannot continue at the primary or secondary level because students at that level are still learning how to be social, learning social cues, and wanting to know more in forming relationships with their peers and their teachers. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none. Then we'll move to the next presenter. Thank you again, Cathy for your presentation. We have Brendan Murphy, followed by Mary Yordon. Brendan Murphy.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Brendan is here.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, Brendan.

BRENDAN MURPHY: Hello. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Brendan Murphy and I'm a union representative for the Connecticut Education Association. I am currently an organizer trainer representing 33 local associations in four counties. Prior to my past five years with CEA I was a high school and middle school special education teacher, and Department Chair.

CEA supports the creation of a task force proposed in SB 976, AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION. However, we believe there is a critical area that should be included in the charge of the task force: The staffing levels available to students receiving special education services. We respectfully suggest that the task force proposed in SB 976 include the study of student to teacher ratios with input from parents, educators, board members, and advocacy groups.

More specifically, the study should take into consideration intensities of various special education services provided, the amount of time students' IEPs indicate as classroom inclusionary time, and other key factors such as the caseload on paraprofessionals who are instrumental in aiding the special education process.



As a former special education teacher and a former Secondary Special Education Department Chair, I was often faced with more intensive services for more students. As a result, special education students can experience services that are less attentive. All classroom teachers experience the impact of increasing special education teacher caseloads as access to inclusionary supports can be strained and students whose services have not received the attention, they need cry out in sometimes aggressive ways.

If you think of this in the simplest terms, if I have 12 students on my caseload, I am able to provide them services and give them a certain amount of attention. If the following year I am given 22 students on my caseload, there is no way I could possibly give those 22 students the same level of services nor attention that I gave to the 12 students in the previous year. I speak to you on this based on my experience as this has actually happened to me in the classroom.

At CEA we have recently compiled a Committee of Special Educators from across the state to represent service providers from pre-k through age 21. This group is tasked with creating reasonable limits that take into consideration intensities of various services, the amount of time IEP indicate as classroom inclusionary time, and other key factors.

Over the past five years I have been lucky enough to work in over 45 districts while with CEA and I will say, all of these districts would have welcomed guidelines from the State Department of Education concerning caseload limits in special education.

As special education budgets are cut and special education teachers caseloads continue to rise,

students' learning conditions deteriorate.  
Additionally, schools' abilities to --

DALLAS EMERLE: You've completed your two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing. Thank you.

BRENDAN MURPHY: Yes. Expanding this task force to look at the impact of staffing levels on students and the intensities of services are critical to fully understanding how best to improve our investment in special education services. I urge you to broaden the scope of your Bill to include our suggestions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from --

BRENDAN MURPHY: You're welcome.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): From the Committee. Rob, Bobby, we got any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, no hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. Brend --  
Brendan, thank you for your testimony.

BRENDAN MURPHY: You're welcome.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next, Mary, Mary, followed by Ashley, followed by Jennifer Parzych.

MARY YORDON: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the work that you're doing today. My name is Mary Yordon, and I'm a teacher certified in Social Studies and French. I'm the president of the Norwalk Federation of Teachers. And I'm a Divisional Vice-President of AFT Connecticut.

Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 977, although I have some concerns to share, and I'm in favor of House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

We support setting standards for virtual learning, which is as it has been pointed out, likely to continue in some form with a review of technology, curriculum, training, and consideration of the efficacy of virtual and hybrid learning, and metrics for accountability and equity leading to standards for virtual learning.

However, virtual learning must also be considered in light of impacts that are not measured and mentioned in the legislation. For example, the development of healthy social interaction skills, of which much has been said today, the impacts on mental health and impacts to the privacy rights of students. Students and teachers alike have experienced trauma directly as a result of virtual learning, and that needs to be carefully reviewed before we continue to implement in non-emergency or even in emergency situations.

We know that virtual learning has been disastrous for certain marginalized communities, and the equity review mentioned in the legislation is essential. We believe very strongly that virtual learning should be delivered by dedicated teachers, a virtual learning and not in a model of concurrent virtual and in-person delivery.

This particular concurrent model is not good for students academically. It's not good for them socially or emotionally, and it's not good for teachers either. With dedicated virtual

teachers, the mandated professional development mentioned in the legislation may need some adjustment.

For Senate Bill 977, AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING. This will set the stage for the next 50 years of education in Connecticut. I urge you to adjust the legislation so that our next generation of graduates have all of the skills to emerge as healthy, productive, wholly functional adults, and so that our educational staff is supported to do their work appropriately as well.

I'd also like to quickly express my support for the House Bill 6557, which provides for screening adequate staffing for a social emotional support program, where either we are eager for screening to be for the purpose of student welfare and adjustments and not for teacher evaluation and accountability.

We do not believe that SLOs are a successful element of evaluation and do not support SEL smart goals for evaluation. Already, our evaluation system requires too many steps and an overreliance on testing and data, and this makes it more so. We support the formation of a working group to examine statutes related to bullying and school climate plans to consider changes as recommended by educators, parents, and students. And we support the inclusion of at least one teacher to be part of a school's climate committee.

We share the goal of an emotionally safe school environment, which is good for students to learn and where for educators to work. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. And I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. I think we have Representative Leeper, have the question.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you Mr. Chair. Thanks, Ms. Yordon, for your testimony and I appreciate you mentioning students' concerns around privacy with virtual learning. I've heard that from several students in our community, but I also noticed that you used the word trauma around virtual learning, and I thought that was a really specific word. And I was wondering if you could share any examples you're aware of, of that trauma.

MARY YORDON: Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate that. So, I think trauma is involved in knowing that a child that you're devoting your working hours to is not thriving, and the model of instruction you're using is not helping, and working so hard in this environment there's trauma in trying to do two things at once and knowing it's not working. I think there's trauma in knowing that we're exposing the privacy of students in very fundamental ways. We want to be serving our students and when we are coming up against times when we are not serving our students and yet working so hard, it's really, really difficult.

I think there are, but I didn't choose that word randomly, I was also thinking about watching students who are unsupervised and having a relationship with them through the screen, but not being able to get them help. So, we've had instances of people having to call DCF because of unsupervised students, unsupervised chat rooms, open meeting links where kids are meeting in unmonitored, unsupervised, inappropriate ways, having access, having middle school kids coming in or high school kids coming in and taking advantage of

elementary school students in unsupervised meets.

It's very difficult to be part of this over and over every day in an exhaustive way. I want to also -- I will share a story where a parent inappropriately interrupted a virtual lesson online and was basically ranting and using inappropriate language about a child who was using a rainbow insignia next to her name and there was a lot of hateful language used by that parent in the middle of instruction.

So, the lesson went from something that was very curriculum-based to really trying to help the child who was traumatized, who had been exploring her sexuality and coming up with this a rainbow for possibly just an ally and possibly finding some expression of her sexuality, but being attacked by a woman that she had never known in the middle of a school setting and there's no way to stop that.

We're exposing our kids to many circumstances where we have this idea that we're in charge, but we are not able to protect them from all the harm that's coming. We have unauthorized recording and taking screenshots of children or adults. Those are ending up in public. Many districts have been working hard to prevent that but many educators are finding that to be a fairly traumatic experience, having transcripts of lessons on being complained about.

These are all really difficult times and we're all doing the best we can, but we can't control this. And it's important if we're discussing it and reviewing it that these types of situations surface.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee? Seeing none. We'll move ahead to our next presenter. Thank you again, Mary. Next up we have Ashley Brooksbank, followed by Jennifer Parzych and then Michelle Catucci. I know I butchered your name Michelle.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Ashley is next.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Ashley?

ASHLEY BROOKSBANK: Yep, I'm here. Good afternoon. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Ashley Brooksbank. I'm a social studies teacher at Ridgefield High School. And I'm here to speak about Senate Bill 977, AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

While COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted the academic, as well as the social emotional learning that typically takes place in the classroom, I implore you to reconsider this proposal, especially the inclusion of at least 18 hours of mandated professional development on virtual learning.

As an educator, I strive to respond to the needs of my students by furthering my own knowledge of topics that allow me to meet my students where they are and to develop their skills in a way that allows for them to continue to grow. Sometimes this means finding new resources to link the content we are learning in class to their everyday life. Other times that means digging further into SEL resources that aid me in building a classroom community where students feel safe and supported.

As educators, we strive to offer our students differentiated instruction, which means that we are tailoring what we do in the classroom to

meet the needs of our students, and to differentiate instruction well, we need time. Eighteen hours of professional development on virtual learning strategies would eliminate the ability of districts to respond to the needs of their teachers in terms of professional development.

Rather than allowing time to collaborate with colleagues on issues relevant to a course or relevant to what is going on in the world at the moment, we would instead be mandated to spend time focused solely on virtual learning platforms. Meeting the needs of individual students is a complex task that requires time. And this proposed mandated professional development would remove the flexibility needed to allow for that to happen in a systemic way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. I just want to be clear, Ashley, do you support the 18 hours of professional or you don't?

ASHLEY BROOKSBANK: I do not. I do not support the 18 hours of professional development. It is too much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. All right. Any questions from the Committee? Bobby?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No. No hands are up. Oh --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Wait a minute. Representative McCarty.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): You're muted. Kath, okay, there you go.



REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I know I can see all the issues with this learning. So, I just wanted to clarify if I may, for a moment, to be sure that you're reading the proposal correctly. I don't -- and I don't think it was the intention of the proposal to specify 18 hours just on professional development for virtual learning. So I just, maybe we need to reread that section that you're referring to, because I think that was more generic, but not specific to the virtual learning.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

ASHLEY BROOKSBANK: And it could be the way that I read it, but I read that as 18 hours to virtual learning.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah.

ASHLEY BROOKSBANK: So, thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah, no, that's okay. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There are no other hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. Ashley, again, thank you for your testimony. Next up, we have Jennifer, followed by Michelle, followed by Joseph Luchene.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And Jennifer is up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Jennifer.

JENNIFER PARZYCH: Yes. Hi. Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and distinguished Members of the

Education Committee. My name is Jennifer Parzych, and I am an associate professor at Southern Connecticut State University, as well as a member of Connecticut School Counselor Association's Government Relations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of House Bill 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING. You'll find my complete testimony [inaudible].

After completing my testimony yesterday, I continued to struggle with the data in front of me from both my teams research specifically in Connecticut on ratios and student outcomes and the CDC's 10 year report on increasing mental health needs.

Prior to becoming a counselor educator, I was a middle school counselor in a Connecticut district for 13 years. I chose to work in that district because I knew they fully supported and implemented a K through 12 comprehensive school counseling programs with appropriate school counselor ratios.

Over my time there between 1999 and 2013, I saw our administration and Board of Education struggle with multiple thoughts for the budget over time. There was thoughtful intention to limit staff productions and eliminate positions of only those who are retiring. Well, this made sense on one hand, has it limited job loss, on the other side, this was shortsighted and didn't demonstrate consideration for the social and emotional needs of our children.

We went from a district with school counseling fully implemented from kindergarten through graduation in appropriate ratios to program implementation limited to grades six through 12 and middle school ratios nearly doubling. Formally, I was able to implement the model,

providing a program of both prevention and responsive services to 250 students to them being tasked with meeting the needs for nearly 400 students.

I recognize I was fortunate to perhaps only have had 400 students where my middle-school counseling colleagues in lower SES communities have 800 or more in the caseload. If we compare that trend of districts losing their elementary school counseling programs with an emphasis on prevention and increasing caseloads of the middle school level to the CDC's reported ten-year trend of a 44% increase of significant mental health needs, I wonder, are we seeing a very real connection to the numbers of access to school counselors and prevention programming being diminished --

DALLAS EMERLE: You've completed two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

JENNIFER PARZYCH: Thank you. Ability to respond appropriately to mental health. Are we also seeing this in relationship to increased anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and lives lost? This is a question I plan to dig into further with research, but in the meantime, I ask you, is this something we can afford to continue to allow happen?

For the sake of our youth, I would much rather study the impact of lowered caseloads, evidence of school counselor effectiveness, and the relationship between mental health needs over the next five to ten years. We must support these needs with adequate and appropriate services that all levels cognizant of the distinct needs of the state's individual communities. And this is a responsibility that must be shared between the state and local budgets and funding. I'll take any questions. Thank you for your time today.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee, Bob? Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I will thank you again, Jennifer, for your testimony. And we'll move right here to Michelle, followed by Joseph, followed by Heidi Gold. Michelle?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Michelle?

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Yes. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are. Okay.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Michelle Catucci and I'm a Director of School Counseling at Cheshire High School and the Executive Director for the Connecticut School Counselor Association.

I am grateful for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of HB 6557. I've been a school counselor for the last 15 years. And this past year, as many of my educator colleagues have already said has been one of the hardest of my career. The job of the school counselor was never easy. It was like working in a triage unit of a hospital while also delivering a systematic program at the same time.

However, the job gets done, but having a strong framework that aligns to state and national frameworks in place with enough school counselors in the building to make it happen. With the pandemic, there are days where my work to support all students feels impossible. Our students are isolated and struggling more than

ever academically, socially, and mentally as so many people have commented on.

As a school counselor, I am doing everything I can to support their needs from a distance and through a computer, and it is a daunting undertaking. I feel like I cannot be there enough for my students right now. I try to connect with them and still provide the school counseling services they deserve and need, but I leave work every day, feeling like I haven't done enough.

As a Director of School Counseling, I'm working tirelessly to support the school counselors in my department and work with our administrators to find creative ways to keep delivering the same high quality school counseling program to all students in this remote and hybrid format as we did when we were in person.

I'm fortunate that I work in a district that believes in the importance of the support services in school counseling and social and emotional learning. We have K through 12 counselors in my district inappropriate ratios. We have systems in place to support all students that even in my district, the pandemic has brought on new tasks and responsibilities to our department that take my time away from being able to do the work of school counseling.

I cannot even begin to imagine how difficult this year has been in districts, where ratios are higher than ours. If we are struggling, others must be drowning. Jennifer just spoke about averages and ratio. So, I will skip over that part for the sake of time, but we need more school counselors in all of our schools, not just high schools, or middle schools, we need more school counselors in urban districts. We need more school counselors in elementary

schools, and those school counselors need to have a manageable number of students.

While a ratio of 250 to one might not be the right fit for all districts. Having some parameter in place to ensure that districts have school counselors in their schools is a step in the right direction for the children of Connecticut.

Currently, there are no requirements for school counseling programs to be implemented at any level in Connecticut. I was on the core writing team for the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling framework that was approved by the State Department of Education this past October. This framework speaks to the students' needs of today --

DALLAS EMERLE: Michelle, you're at two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Thank you. In order for the framework to be delivered with fidelity to most benefit all students, it must be supported by having school counselors with reasonable ratios, no higher than 250 to one to enact a framework at every school in every level K through 12, and having districts ensure that 80% of our time is spent in direct services with students not involved in non-counseling tasks, such as I know, Representative Sanchez, you've talked about attendance things like standardized testing school counselors, those duties fall on us very often, and it takes time away from the direct services that we were trained to deliver for students.

So now more than ever, we need more school counselors. We need more psychologists. We need more school social workers in all of our schools across the country. Our children deserve it. I thank you for the opportunity to

offer testimony. And I am happy to answer any questions if there are any from the Committee.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I just -- I know there's a number of people came up and spoke on behalf of 6557, especially the need with school counselors, but you just made a very good point. It's not just school counselors. You're talking about social workers, psychologists, even mental health workers. I mean, yes, it's a litany of things that our school has, but the reality is we don't have a whole truck full of money, right?

MICHELLE CATUCCI: I know.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): So, you will come over as school counselors say, we need more school counselors. I can bring a psychologist on and said, we need more psychologists. I can be a social worker and say, we need a social worker. I can bring a mental health condition and I said, we need two or three, four of them. I guess I don't really want to ask because it might lead to more.

How would you -- within 30 seconds, how would you prioritize what, and just give me your example in your school district, what would be the priority if you had to choose between those four or five different individuals to serving the needs of your students? In 30 seconds.

MICHELLE CATUCCI:

Thirty seconds. And, you know, selfishly, I'm going to say school counselors first, right.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: But the best schools I've worked in, so I work in Cheshire now, I've also worked in Madison and Wallingford. The best

relationships I've had is where those three roles can work collaboratively together to offer the services that are specific to those. So, school counselors are trained kind of on that tier one, delivering the services to all students, which is why I think we can have a significant impact in schools, but I can't do what a school psychologist does.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Right.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: I can't do that screening. We need social workers to be able to make those community connections too. So, I know there's not an endless pot of money. I really hope that they find ways to bring more money to give, you know, support services in all grounds together. But of course, I have to advocate for school counselors because I do feel that when our program can be delivered the way it's designed that we can have an impact for all students, whereas those other roles have an impact as well. It's just different, and again, they work best in collaboration.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I had a quick question.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Yeah.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I had a quick question. So, Michelle, you're Executive Director of the Connecticut School Counseling Association.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Yes, I am.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. So just something quickly, what efforts are being made to recruit counselors of color because we don't see many counselors of color.



MICHELLE CATUCCI: Yeah. And you don't see many counselors who aren't -- you see a lot of people that look like me, white females, right. You know, we are working with the universities to obviously, you know, support the hiring of counselors of color. CSCA as an organization, we have a group now that is supporting counselors of colors that are counselors of color that are in practice right now, or being trained as interns so that they have a support network for one another.

Our board is doing some work for us to examine our own biases and things like that. So, we spend time at every governing board meeting to talk about issues of diversity, and at the educational level, the practicum and internship requirements that were, I think, you know, preventing some people of color being able to, you know, taking a year off of work for the internship. They've lowered the state requirement for the internship hours so that people could still work and be interns at the same time.

So, I know this is an area of growth. You know, in our state and a lot of areas, certainly in school counseling, but we want to have a supportive network to have more counselors of color. We want our students to have people who they can look to, that look like them and have been through experiences like they have so that they can make those connections.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Bobby. I just want to -- this is not a question. I'll just make a statement. I've been in education with 30 years, elementary, middle, or high school. I've seen one black male counselor in my experiences. And he was outstanding, but there's only been one. So, as

we move to try to diversify our teaching population, I think we need to do that in every aspect of education, every adult that's coming to our classrooms, we keep focusing just on the classroom teacher, but the support staff need to be diversified also.

So, Bobby, I thank you for bringing that up and like a perfect example, everyone who's coming to testify here is the same. And I'm just saying it that's the reality that we live in. And it's bigger than just, you know, going to our state colleges university and recruit them because they're not there. There's not a lot of them.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Actually, that -- I think that leads to a great point that we were talking about in our last board meeting when it comes to recruitment and things like that, we need to be having conversations with kids, not even just in high school, but when they're in middle school and elementary school and empowering them to want to join the, you know, to join the workforce, to want to be in education, in whatever area they want to be in.

But, you know, I think we need to start that work early as early kindergarten to help them get the profession.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I even go a little further. We have a number of people who are social workers, per se, trained social workers. They might not be working in a school system, but managing social. We got -- we got to find a way to leverage that and get them into our schools. I'll just sign in and there might have to be an alternative route program. But that's all I wanted to add. Any other questions for the presenter.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. Thank you again, Michelle, for your testimony.

MICHELLE CATUCCI: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): And we'll come up with Joseph, followed by Heidi, followed by Robyn Kaplan Cho, Kaplan Cho.

JOSEPH LUCHENE: Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Joseph Luchene and I'm the school counseling intern at New Britain High School and a stocker at Costco. I'm a member of the American School Counseling Association, and Connecticut School Counseling Association, and Connecticut Counselors Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of HB 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

My internship at W.F. Kaynor Technical High School last year, internship this year at New Britain High School, and work at Costco were directly impacted by COVID-19. At my internship last March, I noticed students struggling to cope and regulate their emotions under the current circumstances.

Students at both of my internships experienced more setbacks because the restrictions to receiving student support have never been as distant as they have been for the past year. At the same time, I noticed more substance use while speaking with coworkers, members, friends, and those within my community.

When asked how they are coping with the struggles in their life, they shared never learning effective coping strategies to crisis

situations; never mind something devastating such as the limitations they are still experiencing from COVID-19. They also mentioned having no social and emotional learning taught throughout grade school.

Recognize ASCA Model Program, also known as RAMP, shows to implement effective comprehensive school counseling programs for each district. It can be a tedious process; especially with ratios such as 2018-2019, Connecticut's average ratio of one school counselor per 457 students.

Having collaboration from the Board of Education, additional school counselors, psychologists, social workers, Special Education, parent liaisons, potential parents, and community members can assist highlighting more of the needs of individual students. This support can aid in the school counselor's time spent in direct service with students.

The lower student to counselor ratios, the more time can be spent individually, in small groups like lunch bunches and classroom lesson plans around social, emotional, career development transitioning from-and-to the next step of the student's journey, and more.

If I never took the time, to invest in learning more about human development; particularly in youth, then I would have missed out on making the connections of many adults struggling with mental health, and their experiences in-and-out of grade school. Less than 25% of our elementary schools have school counselors and often elementary school counselors are split among several schools. I know personally, I could have benefitted as a child coming from a humble beginning, if there were more counselors and support staff during my time in grade school.

There is so much setback from not meeting student social and emotional needs throughout the decades, that we cannot continue --

DALLAS EMERLE: You've completed your two minutes and 30 seconds if you don't mind summarizing.

JOSEPH LUCHENE: Thank you. That we cannot continue as a society being limited to mental health support. I ask that you support HB 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING; so that all of our students in Connecticut can have access to a school counselor and comprehensive programs. Supporting  
HB 6557 would be beneficial to everyone in Connecticut and the world around us, because we are not only influencing today's generation, but future generations to come. Be a part of the change you wish to see in the world today. Thank you for your time and consideration

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your time.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I just had a quick question. I just had a quick question for Joseph. Joseph, and I ask this to tell the other counselors. At New Britain High School, how much time do you actually spend with students or their families versus doing paperwork, attendance and so forth?

JOSEPH LUCHENE: Well, because the school, in terms of the amount of students that actually come with the option of hybrid being available, where most students opt for virtual, even if they just so happened to not actually attend virtually because as kids, one of the things I realized is they all need some form of adults in their lives to kind of make sure that they are doing what it is that they're supposed to be doing otherwise, as we all know, when we were that age, if we -- if somebody wasn't

telling us exactly what we were supposed to be doing, we probably wouldn't have been doing it.

And so let's say the school there, how is it? It's about 2,400 2,500 students with a lot of students who are struggling, we recommended more of them coming in to school doing two-day learning, four day in person learning. And so a lot of those students who come in, we do have a chance to talk to where, like, one of them mentioned to me when they were at full capacity, there was a time when they would have chairs lined up outside going down the hall, because there's always so many people to be seen because there's such a high, so many needs that needed to be met for the students themselves.

So, I see some of that within there, and I definitely see more of that happening. And I also seen that part of when I was at Kaynor Tech just attending students whenever, but in terms of the paperwork, there was always -- there's always paperwork, extra sheet today with liabilities and lawsuits that just exists even before I even got into the profession or trying to get into the profession, but because a lot of that and the focus on people having to worry about covering themselves and actually being able to do the job that they do, that is where they, I see where that, that talk of getting caught up in the paperwork more than actually seeing the students is a concern in, I'm glad that others have mentioned it. And I'm glad that you asked as well because it's you know, the more perspectives and experience the better in people that all you guys have, the experience that you have, this Committee.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Joseph.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other hands are up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. We'll go to Heidi, followed by Robyn, followed by Aaron McCool.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Heidi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Heidi on here.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. We'll go to Robyn.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see Robyn either.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Aaron McCool, followed by Neville, followed by Sharon Littzi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see Aaron.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Littzi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah, I don't see Aaron. I don't see Neville.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, Sharon?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I can look at the -- No, they're not in the waiting room either.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see. I don't see Sharon either.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, we're going to Ryan Brown.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Ryan Brown. Is Ryan available? No, Ryan.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Here we go.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Here we go. Okay. You're up Ryan? You're on mute right now. You're on mute.

RYAN BROWN: Can you hear me now?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

RYAN BROWN: Kind of echo. Sorry. Can you hear me now?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

RYAN BROWN: Okay. I'm just going to pull. I didn't know I was going so soon. So, I'm going to pull into the gas station real quick. Sorry about that. So, first off, I wanted to apologize for like my setting. We're in a car right now. My girlfriend is pregnant and so we had a doctor's appointment. So that's why we're in the car right now. But I wanted to sort of echo a Bill HB 6556, AN ACT CONCERNING LOSS OF LEARNING, basically addressing loss of learning.

And I wanted to mention two things about that Bill, that wasn't mentioned in the Bill, but I also wanted to support that Bill in general. First, I teach in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and the learning laws that was felt in Bridgeport was magnified to what other students felt in other districts because of the lack of resources that are already there.

And so, a lot of times we tend to use attendance as a marker to see if students are available or if students are showing up to classes, but



previous to the pandemic and actually during the pandemic, we've measured attendance by staring if they show up 50% of the day that they're present. And I think that one thing that we should try to do is define engagement versus attendance because engagement is a little bit different than attendance.

And so, in that Bill, I wanted to echo what other organizations have said that I'm a part of educators for excellence and a coalition and equity in learning who also said to mention engagement a part of that Bill, because it tells more of the story, right? If students are signing into classes at least 50% of the day, then they're marked that they have attendance for the day and then that's it. Right. But it doesn't show if they're doing the work, that doesn't show if they are actually engaged in the lesson, or if they're just showing up.

And a lot of times students, they're not showing up not due to their motivation, but due to what they don't have in terms of resources. So, for example, I have a student I teach in Bridgeport and I have a student who, whenever they're home, they have a hotspot that was given to them, but the hotspot doesn't allow them to do anything but view class. And so, whenever I give assignments or whenever I give work that student cannot participate, cannot do anything because of what they're given and the resources that they have.

And those are circumstances that that student didn't control or their family didn't control. That's just where they live in Bridgeport just in general.

DALLAS EMERLE: You've completed your two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

RYAN BROWN: Yep. Thank you for letting me know. And so just to shorten it up, I'm in support of the Bill, but I do want to add a piece for engagement that we try to measure the data of engagement in each district. So, then it tells more of the story.

I know that other states are not doing this currently, but we could be the first state and kind of the trendsetters in getting this data and actually using it to inform not only future instruction, but also what resources students need, especially in urban districts. So, then every student could be engaged a hundred percent of the time and give them what they need for learning. And that's my time. So, thank you all for allowing me to speak.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions for Ryan?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There is no hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Thank you again, Ryan, for your testimony. We're going to move right along to Terry Bedard, followed by John Flanders, followed by Wendy Simmons. Terry?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Terry Bedard.

TERRY BEDARD: Good afternoon, Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory, Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. I'm Terry Bedard. And today I am speaking on behalf of SEEK Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share our views regarding raised Bills 6556, AN ACT ADDRESSING ISSUES CREATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT, and also raised Bill 977, AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

SEEK is generally in favor of additional learning opportunities with some notable concerns that you can certainly read in our full testimony, but one concern I wanted to highlight for you involves the need for this Bill to recognize that mitigation strategies or compensatory education must be recognized by districts for special education children who've experienced a loss of learning specifically related to the pandemic.

I think we can all agree that education loss is significantly magnified for children with disabilities. I've heard it said that while typical children are walking, children with disabilities must run. How does students with disabilities close learning gaps when they don't necessarily have the same level of intensity and in-person instruction during this pandemic to close those gaps.

Many didn't even have the equipment and internet access needed until months after the school shut down. The reality is these kids have fallen further behind, and school districts are reluctant to admit that these children have not made progress on their watch because typically education to compensate for the loss of learning is based on the failure of the district to provide the education required under the child's IEP.

What we need under this Bill is for the Committee to require the PPT, to provide COVID related compensatory education where needed on an individualized basis for students with disabilities, we have suffered a loss of learning specifically due to the pandemic. Committee should also make clear that schools cannot and should not mandate that students with disabilities must stay after school each

day or attend summer school in order to receive these additional services.

I'm actually reflecting on my son's experience when he was in school with a profound hearing loss, he had limited access to sound, just cochlear implants, but still didn't hear perfectly. All day, he listened very hard to try to figure out and discern what teachers and students were saying, like putting together a puzzle with missing pieces. And then exhausted --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry, you're up to your two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

TERRY BEDARD: Exhausted at the end of each school day, he would still need to review all of the notes to make sure he understood. So, he take off his implants to get that necessary downtime, to energize them for the next day. So, while learning opportunities there, additional learning opportunities are extremely valuable. We cannot assume all special needs children are available for learning every day after school and all through the summer. So, this needs to be a voluntary provision.

Raised Bill 977, many people have spoken about that today. We support the goals, but we urge the Committee to include language that the continuation of remote learning should be considered for some students as appropriate. We've heard many people defy that virtual learning is a challenge. Yes, it is to most stuff, but actually it works well for some cohort of students, such as those that are medically fragile or suffer from debilitating school-related anxiety, for example. So, retain a virtual option can be beneficial for some. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any questions for the presenter? Any questions from the Committee to the presenter?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. We'll move on. Thank you, Terry. John Flanders, followed by Wendy Simmons, followed by Scarlett Lewis.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So, I don't see John Flanders in the waiting room. I don't see Wendy Simmons. I don't see Scarlett Lewis. I don't see Debra Parker. I don't see Kenneth Cavanaugh. And I don't see Axel Mahlke. But we do have Lauren Ruth.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Lauren, you're up.

LAUREN RUTH: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Is Lauren Ruth there?

LAUREN RUTH: Good evening, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Representative McCarty, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Lauren Ruth. I'm testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization, working to ensure that one day Connecticut is a thriving and equitable state where all children achieve their potential.

I have submitted written testimony in support of House Bill 6557 and 6559, but I will only speak about 6559, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD. We strongly support the inclusion of family childcare homes and group childcare homes as school readiness providers, which will improve the equity of Connecticut's early childhood system for providers and families.

For the sake of brevity, I refer only to FCCs, but mean both types of providers. FCCs are small businesses that make up a critical piece of Connecticut's early childhood service array by primarily serving low-income families and families of color. Although we don't have access to Connecticut specific data on the demographics of providers, national research suggests that the majority of FCC providers are women of color.

These businesses participate in Connecticut's economy by providing employment, purchasing goods and services, and allowing parents to work. Compared to many other childcare settings, they're located closer to home, have lower costs for parents and operate with more flexible hours. They're licensed regulated childcare providers. However, they're not reimbursed equitably through school readiness grants that support many preschools.

Under the current reimbursement structure FCC serve the majority of families needing infant and toddler care. Staffing ratios for infant and toddler care makes this care more expensive to provide than preschool care. And when providers cannot generate additional revenues through serving preschoolers, the costs are unsustainable.

Connecticut Voices for Children modeled that the cost of revenue for prototypical FCC and our conservative model estimated a pre-tax net income of under \$22,000 per year. For providers working full-time this equates to an hourly salary of about \$6 per hour and puts a family of three below the federal poverty level.

It should be no surprise that since 2002 Connecticut's FCCs have decreased by 45%

contributing to the state's infant and toddler shortage. So, changing state policy to include FCCs as school readiness providers will encourage parents with preschoolers to keep their children enrolled in FCC care, instead of transferring the children to other types of providers that currently offer school readiness slots.

Connecticut Voices for Children advocates that the State of Connecticut should build a system of universal access to early childcare and the federal government should build a universal early childcare system to ensure that there is an equitable and robust economic recovery from the pandemic. As part of that plan, we enthusiastically support the steps in this Bill that would make Connecticut's early childcare system more equitable and economically sustainable for the women providing these critical childcare services and for the low-income families and families of color accessing childcare services through FCC providers.

So, with that, I am happy to answer any questions and I really thank you for your time tonight.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Laura. And thank you for your testimony. Representative Sanchez, do we have any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, no, we don't have any hands up. Just want to let you know Lauren that we're alarmed in support of the FCC. So, we'll see what happens moving forward with this Bill.

LAUREN RUTH: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Lauren. Moving right along, who do we have less, Bobby?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): The next person is Gamila Elbashir. I know I saw her.

GAMILA ELBASHIR: Yeah, yeah, I'm here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are. Okay. You're next.

GAMILA ELBASHIR: Thank you, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of the raised Bill 6559, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD.

My name is Gamila Elbashir. I'm the owner director of Weeducare Academy located in West Haven, Connecticut. I'm a former member of the West Haven Early Childhood Council, a member of the American Psychological Association, Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children, Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, and many other organizations that circled in families and communities.

I support raised Bill 6559. This Bill is important to me because I'm not a babysitter. I'm educator, I provide high quality childcare and an essential service to my community. I'm a licensed head teacher with 10 years' experience as a lead training teacher for West Haven School Readiness Program, and was part of their [inaudible] team. I have 11 years' experience as a family childcare provider. I have a degree in early childhood education, general studies, optimization and management, and a master's degree in community psychology, with 21 years' experience working with children ages six weeks through 12 years of age.

I chose to open a family childcare program because of my true passion for children and a desire to own a business. My quality improvement rating



system score, which is five out of five. With me among the first, NAFCC accredited family childcare centers in the state. The NAFCC accreditation is similar to the NAEYC accreditation regarding the requirements and the quality of care. We do use the same tools for assessment and observations. We use the same curriculum lesson plans. we do provide -- we do conduct home visits and parent-teacher conferences.

My educational program in community psychology helps me to better serve my West Haven community by providing direct support to my parents, empower single mothers by connecting them to resources and more importantly, helping struggling children by providing them consistent care, supporting their learning and curriculum roles, and encouraging their full potential.

My program meets the needs of a specific population that often far better in family childcare than in centers or a school-based program like DCF children, children with special needs, and parents who need flexible schedules. I do get referrals from the West Haven School Readiness Program --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you've already completed two minutes and 30 seconds, if you don't mind summarizing

GAMILA ELBASHIR: Okay. I get the referrals from the West Haven School Readiness Program for children who struggled in bigger settings, but the school readiness does not pay for them when they come into my program. Family childcare programs are located in convenient locations and will offer more slots for towns that is struggled with spaces instead of sending a school readiness skill to nearby students. And this is what was aiming during the past.

But we are undervalued because of our title as family childcare educators. And this is a clear sign of racial and socioeconomic inequity. My program serve the most economically disadvantaged children and families, and should be equal valued as centers. In closing, supporting OEC's proposal to include accredited family childcare providers in school readiness is only for Connecticut because it increases access to high quality slots, a win for parents, a win for providers and a win for providers and it will help move the state closer to its equity goals. Thank you for the opportunity to justify.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you. And thank you for the service you provide to the communities in which you are serving. We definitely need it. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No. Thank you, Gamila. Thank you so much. Next, we have Brooke Cheney and then after that Marta Shepard. Brooke?

BROOKE CHENEY: Yes. Can you hear me? Am I good?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We can hear you.

BROOKE CHENEY: All right. Great. Thank you so much. So hi, my name is Brooke Cheney. Members of the Education Committee. It's been a long day. It's been a very educational for everybody. I think I enjoyed listening to the Commissioner this morning about all the plans that we have for the children of Connecticut.

I come here before you this morning or this afternoon, which is not this evening yet. We've got a couple of minutes and I oppose SB 977. As you've already heard a bunch of times the distance learning is just very hard for everyone and it's very challenging. So, I think SB 977 scares people like me as moms that we see the pain and suffering that's going on just within our own households.

We talk to other parents and we hear what's going on. I know that you have the best interests of our children at heart. And I just hope as a taxpayer, that you would utilize this meeting, for example, because it has been so very educational from multiple ways of looking at things, to focus on the existing programs that we already have within our state and maybe instead of creating new ones, actually make other things more available and more educate people about what their options are.

Let's see. I'm trying to go by bullet points instead. One of the things that I've learned working in politics is that one size never fits all. And as so many other people today have talked about is guidelines are great, mandates are not generally so great for the one size fits all mentality. I know that our education system, some places are more well service than others. And of course, we need to bring up the ones that are less serviced and take care of the people in need.

I ask you Representatives and Senators to not reinvent the wheel. Look at the places that are working. Look at individual cases, don't try to put more state mandates on the back of taxpayers. As a mom of a 13-year-old, when my daughter said after two months of home learning last year, "Mom, when are we going back to school?" I about fainted because this child, I had to force her to get out of bed every

morning. She hated to go to school, but after being away from her friends and her kids, Oh, Dallas, I am currently at 2:30. I just figured out I let you know.

So, I will summarize, I am just asking you guys. Oh, I got to turn off my alarm that says I'm at 2:30. How about that? So, I would like to ask that you guys do not reinvent the wheel, work with what we have and improve it. And in my testimony, which I haven't seen on the website, yet, there are lots of links to suicide prevention and about the statistics regarding our children with that mental health issue.

And I do support all the things you guys are looking to do as far as increasing counseling and that sort of thing. But I am still against SB 977. Thank you for your time. And I'm amazed that speaker 110 that were done before 10:00 o'clock tonight. So. I will see you all at the next meeting.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any hands up on that.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, well, thank you again, Brooke.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

BROOKE CHENEY: You're welcome. Have a good night.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So next is Marta Shepard, followed by Kate Field.

MARTA SHEPARD: Good afternoon, Senator Doug McCrory, Representative Robert Sanchez, and the Members of the Education Committee. My name is Marta Shepard and I am currently Executive Vice

President of Hartford Federation of Paraeducators Local 2221 and I have been a paraeducator at Hartford Public Schools since 1989.

I am here to speak in favor of the HB 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SECTION 17 AND 18. This study would enable for council to continue to create a pathway for career and professional development for paraeducators to be successful in the classroom setting.

Many paraeducators like myself are at the top step and are not going to make any more money. We do not make as much as the lowest step as teacher beginning salary. Opportunities for economic advancement are extremely limited. The cost of living is another factor in decisions when trying to overcome a range of academic and economic challenges to earn teaching credential.

As of February 23, 2021, the average annual pay for paraeducator in Hartford is \$29,849. This is the salary before taxes, let us make that clear. Economic factors are one of the hardest obstacles for us returning as students.

This is one of the main reasons many of us have second jobs. I feel that this Bill will best maximize the success of the paraeducators when it comes employment standards and provide a clear path to teacher certification. This means we will be able to fill the shortage of teachers with a diverse group of paraeducators that we already have, who will continue to help our students construct positive cultural identity and cope in an environment of inequities.

Growing up myself in Hartford, I remember as a student my teachers at John C. Clark

Elementary. As I got older, I realized that many of those teachers were the paraprofessionals. I remember a healthy learning environment that was safe and nurturing. I did not know the difference between the teacher and the paraprofessional. It was a community school that was very diverse and engaged and they engaged the child as a whole. All I knew was that they the teachers and paras worked hard in providing me a great education which included enrichment and cultural responsiveness. I truly admired them because they were my mentors and my superheroes.

Today, we have some of the hardest working paraeducators who are under pay but come back faithfully because like me, we really love our jobs and our children. We also have many new challenges --

DALLAS EMERLE: You're at two minutes and 30 seconds if you don't mind summarizing it.

MARTA SHEPARD: We also have many new challenges of assisting many students at one time. Many of them have behavior issues and learning disabilities. Others have physical and mental disabilities. We are teaching with minimal space and resources. Due to lack of staffing, there has been burn out and an increase work related injury.

Paraeducators have been giving more duties and responsibilities and no pay equity to reflect their hard work. Many are not giving the proper training, respect, and recognition. Since the Pandemic, CDC guidelines and remote learning has posed a new challenge for the paraeducators, but they have been resilient.

Paraeducators are the grassroots of the community and the classroom. There is a new era of individuals that want to run our schools like a business with data and tests and have not been successful. I am traditional and I'm old school. I believe in the community base or as they say, "it takes a village as to raise a child". Therefore, I am in favor of this Bill in creating and providing proposals for the success of all our paraeducators.

Thank you all for your time and opportunity and I will be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I will say we do have a question from Representative Welander, but I also want to say Marta, thanks for the service that you're providing for the young people in the city of Hartford. You made a very good point. As a young person, myself going through the Hartford school system, I couldn't differentiate between the para or the teacher because the para was so much involved. In many cases, did a much better job of handling the classroom and handling the students than the certified instructor.

So again, and we're trying to do a lot of things because we do realize that because of the skillsets that our paras have, we will like to transition them into the teaching profession. So, we do have one program, but that was only for paras who have actually have their bachelor's degree. I think the next step is to help those paras who are -- who want to obtain their bachelor's degree to do that. So again, thanks for the work you're doing and ask Mary to ask her question. Welander, Representative Welander.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Thank you. Actually, I just wanted to echo what Senator McCrorey said and just thank you for the work that you've been

doing, that all of our paras are doing. Paraeducators are a vital part of our school environments and schoolhouse culture, and our classrooms couldn't run without them. So, thank you for everything that you and your colleagues have been doing and for sharing your experience today.

MARTA SHEPARD: Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions or comments from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, thank you again, Marta. Next up?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Kate Field.

KATE FIELD: Hi, good afternoon. Good afternoon Chairs and esteemed Members of the Education Committee. My name is Kate and I'm a specialist at the Connecticut Education Association. I am also a proud former teacher and school administrator. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of aspects of House Bill 6557 and 6556.

I'll ask that you refer to my written testimony for specific points regarding each Bill. And instead, I'd like to utilize my speaking time just to express how refreshing it is to hear so many favorable comments for social emotional learning for kids. I've been here along with all of you since 10 and have actually really enjoyed hearing the comments, but also become really frightened by them.

So, it seems like the time is right for Senate Bill 6557. Our kids are in crisis. It's a national emergency and they need all of the mental health resources and SEL supports that we can



possibly provide. But I think we've heard from some teachers too that have repeatedly used words like exhausted and I think we have to realize that their mental health crisis is affecting them also either as secondary trauma and additionally, just responding to the completely unknown reality that is teaching day-to-day during a pandemic.

And I appreciate that this Bill is carving some space for us to begin to re-imagine an educational system that's more equitable, that really truly meets the needs of a whole child and not just a standardized test score. I mean, we've seen now more than 10 years of over-testing and what do we have to show for it, but a generation of stressed-out kids and teachers who are burning out and don't have the support or the time necessary to meet those needs.

So, I truly do appreciate this Bill. I've recommended in my written testimonies some minor suggestions for additions. But I think it's time that we think about throwing out our prescriptive pacing guides and our solely academic measures in terms of how students are growing.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry, Kate, you're at two minutes and 30 seconds.

KATE FIELD: Yeah. I'm really done, but I just wanted to, again, thank the sponsors of this Bill and just urge a little bit of additional flexibility for districts in terms of how they implement what's been recommended in the Bill. I think this is a great step forward for students and for meeting the needs of the whole child. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No. We don't have any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. Again, Kate, thank you for your testimony. And we're going to move right to Denise, followed by Kim Harris, followed by Rochelle Brown.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So, Denise Learned is not on, but we do have Kim Harris, so we'll move right onto Kim Harris. Kim?

KIM HARRIS: Hello. Can you hear me?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, we can hear you. How are you?

KIM HARRIS: Okay. Very well. Thank you so much to Representative Sanchez and Senator McCrory and Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Once again, my name is Kim Harris. I live and work in Newhallville, one of the most underserved communities in New Haven and Hamden.

I'd like to flip scenario and take look at things from a different point of view. In 1968 two Black women, my mom Pat Harris and my auntie Margaret Tucker had the audacity to think about business ownership. In 1970, they opened the Harris and Tucker School. A school where black and brown children could see people like them with values that resembled their household and community, a place where children could learn, grow, and serve as productive citizens like Dr. Russell, Roger Van, and countless others.

Forty-five years later, I founded Inspired Communities Inc., to help eradicate barrier to

living better lives in all aspects of Newhallville and other underserved communities. My team and I have worked tirelessly to give black and brown people hope and drive to live another day with the possibility of starting and owning their own businesses and organizations.

We believe that section 7 of HB 6558 takes away access. Access to opportunity by stripping away life and livelihood. You see to stripe away life is to take away avenues for educating your values and beliefs. You stripe away life and livelihood by taking away one's ability to create legacies that support trust and longevity and even the American way.

I think the bigger aspect is how today resemble 1968 during civil unrest and not having a sit at tables that makes critical decisions for access. I urge this Committee to rethink the task force committee and its impact on a sector of the childcare industry that for generations have known that access to business ownership leads to legacy building and a future for our children in our communities and people that resemble us.

Today, in this very moment I'd like to dedicate my last 15 seconds to all those childcare industry owners of the past and the present and with your thoughtful consideration and rethinking of the task force business owners of the future. As for me and my community we humbly thank you for this opportunity to speak and not be left out of the process. Thank you

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Kim. Just a quick question. Your concern about the task force, you just feel as though there should be more representation from business owners on the task force. Is that your concern?

KIM HARRIS: Does it. So, we need to look at how it represents. Correct, how it represents everybody. And not only that, if we think about this task force and what could possibly happen, we could be eradicated from the business sector if teachers aren't allowed and we know, we know we need to have teachers that can go up the ladder.

We're not disputing any of that, but to be able to grow your own teachers and once you grow your teachers, you know, for them to just walk away, step away, I think that if we could somehow create a one tier system and not a multi-tiered system within the early childhood industry, it might serve us all better.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. I got you.

KIM HARRIS: Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): That makes sense. I think that's something we have to look on that. And that's something that Commissioner and I talked about before this meeting to make it seamless for those people who want to get in, who want to get it early. I agree. So, that's we're working on that. We will definitely modify that task force to bring another set of eyes to it. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none. We'll move along. Thank you, Kim.

KIM HARRIS: Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. So, we have now Rochelle Brown. I know I saw her. There we go. Hi, Rochelle. Hello.

ROCHELLE BROWN: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Hi, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE BROWN: Hello. Hello. Good day Chairs and Members of the Committee. My name is Rochelle Brown and I teach kindergarten in Windsor. I'm also Connecticut's 2021 Teacher of the Year and a representative of the Windsor Education Association. I sincerely thank you for allowing me to speak in regard to SB 977, ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

This year, we faced many challenges in regards to distance learning. We've worked diligently to maintain high standards and utilize the best practices for our students, so they can be in a safe environment where they can learn, grow, and develop educationally, socially, and emotionally. This is why it is critical to have standards for virtual learning that will ensure that all students are receiving an optimal and equitable learning experience.

Specifically teaching virtually and in-person simultaneously is to the detriment of our students' learning and is not in best practice. We feel the stress of knowing how it negatively impacts our students. It is a constant struggle to keep all students engaged with the requirements of small group, whole group, and tiered instruction.

If the focus is on one group, a teacher cannot manage and monitor the other groups. This is a challenge when all students are present in-person and it is significantly greater with this dual class model. We want to maintain a healthy balance between having students do too much work electronically, and having them engage in meaningful activities and assignments that will promote growth and learning.

For our online students, however, all of the assignments given must be modified, adapted, and digitized, requiring a significantly heavier workload for teachers, because we want all students to receive an equitable experience where spending more time to create, prepare, manage, and provide feedback to students in a timely manner.

Our greatest desire is to do what is best for our students, and we'll accommodate the least amount of disruption to their growth and learning. Communicating with families of online students during the instructional day, providing help to all students who need it, ensuring that students are attending online sessions, making sure that every student has the resources needed for every lesson, creating assignments that are relevant and appropriate for all students, and ensuring student accountability are just a few of the responsibilities that we must fulfill, because students are at the center of all that we do and our top priority, we must do this for them.

Teachers need training, sufficient planning, time, and resources to do what is in our students' best interests. This is critical. It is in the best interest of all students, for teachers to receive adequate planning time so that we can utilize best practices for our students. An additional hour each day, or one day each week dedicated to planning is needed.

We should also eliminate the dual teaching model.  
Educators cannot successful --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry Rochelle, you're at two minutes and 30 seconds if you don't mind summarizing.

ROCHELLE BROWN: Thank you. Thank you. Manage two different classrooms simultaneously.

Ultimately, it is our greatest hope that all students will be able to return to in-person learning. But until this happens, they should be engaged in either in-person or virtual learning and teachers should engage solely in in-person or virtual teaching.

Please help us to utilize the resources, time, and expertise that we have to the best of our ability. We will continue to go above and beyond to ensure that our students receive our best so that they can achieve their best. Thank you for your consideration regarding this very important matter.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony, Rochelle, and I just want to acknowledge I don't think everyone heard you on this Committee. Rochelle Brown is Connecticut's 2021 Teacher of the Year and she teach in the community of Windsor, Connecticut. So again, congratulations, Rochelle. Let's give a hand clap.

ROCHELLE BROWN: Thank you, Senator McCrory.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): And any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any. Congratulations again.

ROCHELLE BROWN: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. Thank you. Next?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have John Board.

JOHN BOARD: Hey, Representative, how are you?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi, John, how are you?

JOHN BOARD: Long time to see. Good to see you, sir.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): A little while.

JOHN BOARD: Just, just for a note, Mr. Chairman, Scarlett Lewis is in the waiting room as well. So, if we could get her up at some point, just as a note to you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We're going back to people.

JOHN BOARD: All right. I just wanted to let you know. Can I proceed?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

JOHN BOARD: All right. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair McCrory, Chair Sanchez, Ranking Member Berthel Ranking Member McCarty, and Members of the Education Committee. I'm John Board. I'm here to testify on 6557, AN ACT CONCERNING SEL.

At first, I would first like to associate my remarks and any supplemental testimony with that of Dr. Chris Kukk and Scarlett Lewis. During my time as an undergraduate at Western, I had the opportunity to work alongside both of these individuals on policy relating to compassion and SEL.

Coming out of the pandemic it is essential that we have support systems in place for our k-12 students, so then we can set them up for success and they can reach their full potential. If we have learned anything this year it is the importance of human connection and having compassion towards each other, towards one another.



In his book, *The Compassionate Achiever*, Dr. Kukk defines compassion as, "A holistic understanding of a problem or the suffering of another with commitment to act to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering." We need to have more understanding professionals in schools to assist students through the complex and ever-changing environment they are encountering, even more so than previous generations.

I would also want to make a comment, Mr. Chairman that we need to look at special education funding and formulas. These are my IEP 504 and PPT notes from my time in high school with more extensive SEL. I'm --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt you, you're coming up on the time limit, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

JOHN BOARD: I'm worried that there would be more, more paperwork for our administrators to do. On the last note that I'll make is in regards to Commissioner Russell Tucker's testimony this morning. I'm pleased that she's taking an interdisciplinary approach to education as many of you know, I'm a fan of interdisciplinary learning as an interdisciplinary degree graduate myself.

So, I would encourage the Committee to vote yes on 6657. And I'm prepared to answer any questions which the Committee may have. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Mr. Board. Hi, I'll thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry. Thank you very much for your testimony and also thank you for

holding a place online with us for Scarlett Lewis. I wanted to thank you for all of your time spent in Newtown and that compassionate work that you've done with us.

When you hold up those piles of paperwork, your files from high school, can you put context on that? What is it that, that we're looked at that, that we're looking at? And how does that relate to your contention about, you know, metrics and paperwork that teachers are involved in?

JOHN BOARD: Absolutely. First of all, thank you Representative for the question. Mitch, you know, Newtown, Redding, Danbury hold, all three of those communities hold a special place in my heart, especially, all the work that I did with one sweet woman Pat [inaudible] after 12/14. So, my heart, you know, is very much still in that community.

As it relates to all this paperwork, this is my PPT 504 and IEP notes from 2005 to 2012. So, this is only middle school and high school. Never mind what I had back in, I didn't pull the files from elementary school.

The brief, the reason why I brought these out and I wasn't intending to, but even though I fully support the Bill, I'm worried that we have a sense of over-diagnosis as it relates to testing in special education, which as you very well know, representative will drive up our special education costs in the state and potentially put more of a burden on our municipalities at the end of the day.

While, I do think everyone should have the opportunity to be tested, I think we need to flush out the structure of that testing as we move forward. And I know that's a discussion

that we can have at a later date moving forward.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you very much for that. Yeah, we certainly don't want to, you know take teachers and team members out of the classroom and in counseling settings too to work on that kind of, you know, paperwork. So, but, you know, the concept of social and emotional learning, pardon, pardon, when I'm about to say it's very environmental as opposed to, you know, the metrics and the testing thing, obviously we do want to diagnose, you know, dyslexia and autism early so that we can furnish the proper supports. But SEL is very cultural as well.

JOHN BOARD: Absolutely.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): And you recognize that very, very well from your time in Newtown with, you know, some of the most caring people that, you know, that I know. So, thank you for all of your efforts and your tenacious follow-up, I appreciate it very much.

JOHN BOARD: Absolutely. And thank you Representative.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions by the Committee? Seeing none.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): It doesn't look like --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Do you see any, Bobby? Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No. Thank you, John.

JOHN BOARD: Hey, thanks Representatives. Thanks Senator. Great to see everyone. Hopefully, we can catch up in-person soon. Have a good one.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. After John, we have, I don't know if Natasha, it doesn't look like Natasha Valdez is on here. No. So, we'll go right to Chris Minutolo, Minutolo?

CHRIS MINUTOLO: Minutolo.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Sorry if I got it wrong.

CHRIS MINUTOLO: That's quite all right. Thank you. Yeah, it's Minutolo. First of all, thank you for allowing me the chance to testify on behalf of myself and my son. My name is Chris Minutolo and I am a parent of a Naugatuck High School Senior with Asperger's.

And I wanted to speak out against SB 977, especially, regarding the importance of school counselors and aides for special needs children and how they relate to virtual learning.

I understand that this Bill is how to make virtual learning more uniform and better serve our children. I just want to give a parent's perspective very quickly about what happens with school counselors and aides are taken away from children with autism and how damaging virtual learning has become.

One common trait with Asperger's is that there's a lack of proper social skills. All of his childhood, my son has struggled with this through trial and error and mistakes and missteps, but especially with the help from teachers, teachers' aides, as well as his peers, my son has become, it has come a long way over the years.

This was until about a year ago when we switched over to virtual learning and now hybrid

learning. Because my wife and I both worked full time, there was no adult supervision during his school hours. He has no one to turn to when help is needed. Sure, there's always a way for him to email or call someone via video at the school for help, but it's not even close to the same thing that is needed when you need help with your schoolwork.

Feeling like he was not getting the help that he needed, my son has been acting out in many ways, between yelling at the computer, punching holes in the walls, taking his aggression out on family members --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt Chris, you're coming up on the time limit if you could summarize.

CHRIS MINUTOLO: Sure. I don't need to go into all the details. I think you get my point that there's a lot of, a lot of services that are being taken away through virtual learning and, you know, we've never had the need for virtual learning for something like this in the past. Therefore, we should never have to deal with this again.

Although I'm sure this Bill has good intentions, I feel that our children could be better served if our focus was on using a virtual learning experience just in extreme emergencies and only for a short period of time. The actual -- the mental health crisis created by this virtual learning and hybrid learning has become the real epidemic. And that is why I oppose the need for SB 977. Thank you for my opportunity to testify.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, thank you again for your testimony, Chris. So, we'll move on to the next individual.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. So, I don't see Reginald Hayes and I don't see Eileen Ward. So, I guess it's Georgia Goldburn. I did see her. Georgia?

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: I'm here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi. There you are.

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: Hey, good afternoon, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Educational Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 6558. My name is Georgia Goldburn and I live in Middletown. I have been the director of Hope Child Development Center for 15 years. We are located in New Haven and we serve children six weeks all the way through age 13.

I'm also the co-founder of CERCLE, which is a network of childcare business providers of color in Greater New Haven and Bridgeport area. We have about 80 childcare providers on that make of our group. I've already submitted written testimony in support of most of the aspects of HB 6558. And so, I will let those stand, but I sit here or I would like to speak on Section 7, which I vehemently oppose, which is the creation of a task force that will examine establishing a new credential that will be recognized both by OEC and by SDE.

In my opinion, this new credential will ensure that future students in ECE programs will have more pathways to higher earning career. And we'll revive dying ECE programs in the colleges and universities. And while this solves a problem

for higher ed in future ECE professional, it permanently shuts down the pipeline of workers for the childcare industry and creates a glide path for the existing workforce to enter into the public school, making it all, but certain that programs like HOPE will be made --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, Georgia, you're coming up on the time limit, if you could summarize. Thank you.

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: Okay. I think solving the compensation crisis in a childcare industry will move Connecticut toward more equitable early care and education system with a robust pipeline. This task force is a death knell for childcare businesses and should not be allowed to advance. What must be created in its instead is a task force that's made up of early childhood system builders, parents, childcare business, stake stakeholders to address once and for all the compensation crisis in the childcare industry.

That is the only acceptable order of events that will ensure that Connecticut continues to have stable and thriving childcare businesses. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Cook, who has a question?

REP. COOK (65TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Georgia, it's great to see you, and thank you for your testimony. You started to tap on a little bit about what this would do to businesses. I hear that you were adamantly opposed to Section 7 and I cannot echo the sentiments and I know that our good Chairman is

going to -- is going to clap and raise his hands when I say that early childcare providers are not compensated enough and we need to do more for them.

So, if you were to look at this and this task force, and can you explain more in depth what this does to your businesses and how it's going to hurt the childcare businesses as a whole? I heard you tap on that just a little bit, but I would like you to go into that a little bit further, please.

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: So, I won't go over all the issues with the payment. I think everybody has heard all of the testimony and we're all steeped in the history of the low wages in childcare. And so, the creation of this new credential actually replaces the ECTC and it also replaces the 112 what's happening right now with the ECTC and the 112, it kind of limits the mobility of childcare workers into the public school.

We are losing childcare workers to the public schools, but our credential really limits the mobility of our workforce. This basically just breaks down the entire wall. And so, imagine that you have a damn wall, that's basically been broken down, the higher Ed program, ECE programs will be revived. And I suspect that's why higher Ed is very interested in doing this because they cannot attract anyone into their ECE program because the work -- the industry is just not an alluring career for future workforce -- for future workers.

And so basically it will, by higher Ed saying, "Hey, you have more career pathways with this credential. You don't -- you no longer have to work in a childcare center. You can work in a public school. You can work to birth to three." Well, it will guarantee that no one is



going to choose to work in a childcare center if we have not addressed a compensation issue. And so, what it will do is it will permanently close the pipeline of any future workers we have. And once this credential replaces the 112 and the ECTC, the current workforce that we have will basically be involved in a massive exodus into the public school.

So, we're no longer going to have access to a future pipeline. We are going to lose our current pipeline. There is no way I can operate my business if I do not have staff. And the only people I'm going to be able to attract in that situation are people that are not credentialed, not qualified, not capable, don't have a whole lot of choices and that's what's going to be left for the childcare industry. It's just basically the scraps and what we're going to be dealing with is the carnage of that.

And none of our businesses will -- many of our businesses, especially business of color that does not have the resources to try to woo, you know, highly qualified people in our businesses. Because again, in order for us to do this, we would have to charge the parents what it's going to cost to do that. And we cannot do that now. We will not be able to do that right now. So, the only thing that this task force will do, and with all due respect about them, adding compensation as a core part of it, that's like asking the wolf to basically to secure the hen house.

It's not going to happen. Why would they be invested in our business? They are going to be much more invested in our business and having more representation on the Committee, it still doesn't change the intent of the Committee. The Bill, the language of the Bill was very clear. We want to create a credential. We're going to think about compensation, but the

intent of it is to create a credential, and childcare businesses are tired, and we cannot continue to do this anymore.

REP. COOK (65TH): Thank you for that. And I think that, you know, we've worked together now going on 13 years, trying to improve childcare in the state of Connecticut. I think it's vitally important that we recognize that our, you know, again, you know, our Chairman Sanchez, he, you know, he comes from this industry as well. So, he has a vested interest in where we are and what could actually move us back, you know, decades from what we fought for currently, and compensation is truly the issue. Access to care is an issue, but access to staff.

And I look at the removal of the ECTC and the 112 and say, how many childcare facilities are going to go out of business? You know, does this create more work? I understand it's just a task force, but I hear what you're saying to the underlining, the underlining intent of that taskforce means we're eliminating this and maybe we'll get something on the other side.

So, if you were to say, if you were to say, remove this task force completely and give us more money, which we obviously know is an issue, how would you improve the access to care if they - if the OEC or whoever, you know, who's behind this feels that this is the solution.

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: Well, I think it goes back again to compensation because if we address the compensation issue, it actually solves every single person's problem. So, the issue with higher Ed attracting people, the issue with our industry attracting people. If we have parity between compensation with a teacher with a bachelor's degree in 20 years, as the same as an elementary school teacher, then you are

going to have a lot of people who are going to want to come into early care and education.

We will be able to have a robust childcare industry because we will have staff and abundance of staff to really address it. And so, by creating another task force that is heavily weighted towards higher Ed's mission and vision, and then throwing in a few people in there to say, "Hey, you know, let's you guys, or you guys can be there too to add your voice to the compensation issue." That's not, that's not a workable solution, what we need to do.

And by the way, I don't think we should completely scrap the task force. I just think it's premature and it is reckless to put the task force ahead of a compensation task force. And you cannot ask higher Ed to figure out the compensation issue is like me putting together a taskforce of childcare businesses to give proposal to the board of regions. We would never accept it any other way.

So why are we asking higher Ed to come in to have a voice in what will fix the issue in our industry? And so, we have to, if -- I don't think we should scrap the taskforce. I think we should scrap this task force and create and reconstitute a task force that deals solely with the compensation issue. I know that they're brilliant people that are out there that have been thinking about this issue that can come together, sit down, and propose something for the state.

We have \$300 million that's coming to us right now. We have to use this time to come up with a plan so that when this money comes to us and possibly any future money comes to us, we are poised as a state to take advantage of this, to really build up and firm up our childcare industry. And then once we have done that,

absolutely we can address the credential issue, but we cannot do this and we cannot address a credential issue at the risk of childcare businesses.

And it's not just childcare businesses. We're talking about children. We're talking about communities of color. We're talking about businesses that are going to be devastated with anything that comes out of this task force. And from my perspective, I don't see this as just a taskforce. I see this as just business as usual with what has been happening for many years, where we are telling childcare workers, we'll get to it. We get to what we promise. We'll get to it. Just hold on one more year. Hold on one more year. Let's just fix this compensation thing. Let's just jump through this credential hoop, jump through that credential hoop. And we have done that. We have done all of those things.

It is time for you to come and basically respond to our cry and our plead of years of saying, we need compensation reform. We need a task force to come up with a plan and I'm sorry, I'm getting emotional, but I am just seeing all these childcare businesses just freaking out about this and just feeling frustrated, feeling like their business after we've survived the COVID pandemic to pile this on to us on top of everything. It's too much. It's too much. We need the state to show up for us. I'm sorry.

REP. COOK (65TH): And I agree with you, Georgia. And I know I'm sorry, Doug, just in closing, I think that we've looked at compensation long enough that we don't have to continue to look at it. We already know that our early childhood educators are not compensated appropriately.

And I do believe that that should be the primary charge of what we're going to do. I also recognize that we have instilled the fact that our early childhood educators needed to have certifications, whether it be an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree, and I've been pushing back and forth, you know this, I've been pushing back and forth on this for many years, knowing that we don't have enough children or young adults in the system to be able to fill those needs as well.

So, if we're going to make change, effective policy change and things that are going to change our society, it's not removing children from childcare. It's not having people lose their jobs or closing businesses. I agree with you. Especially now, it should be about figuring out a way to compensate our early childhood providers with a wage that is above a minimum wage that is actually a living wage.

And that for me is still not enough because our early childhood educators are set the foundation after our parents to do their job and to make our kids ready for school. So, thank you for everything that you do. I think the Chairman's indulgence. I've been very quiet all day. But this one really gets me going. It's something that we've been fighting about for a long time, and I don't want us to lose our momentum. So, thanks Georgia for everything.

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: Thank you. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Georgia, Georgia, I just want to add quickly thank you for coming on and explaining the industry side of the Bill. I think you educated me extremely well. Now I understand both sides of it, because I had the conversation I had, I knew what direction they were going and I knew what the needs they had,

but now also understand the needs of the industry that you're in.

So, I appreciate your coming on and explain it for a layperson to understand. I appreciate. Any other comments or questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I just wanted to say real quick that I've been preaching this since 2011, so let's move on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Alright, who's up next?

GEORGIA GOLDBURN: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have -- we're going back, I guess, Jen Phippen. Jen Phippen?

JEN PHIPPEN: Thank you so much for fitting me back in. This has been very interesting listening to all the other people speak. You all have an amazing hard job. So, thank you for all you do. And thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts on SB 977.

We all know that virtual learning was born out of necessity as a response to the COVID 19 pandemic. I teach kindergarten in Ridgefield. In my district, this new type of learning has evolved over the year. We started last March with full online instruction, move to hybrid learning for the start of the school year, then by October to a whole class in-person model with very few students learning remotely per parent choice. It sounds very confusing, doesn't it?

Educators have risen to this challenge from developing online platforms for learning last spring to the current hybrid practice. The learning for teachers over this past year has been enormous. We've learned how to navigate virtual classrooms and become tech experts. It

has meant rethinking nearly every aspect of our day to ensure that safety measures and academic expectations are being met.

While this new platform is working, it comes at a cost where the workload is unreasonable between all of the technology planning for different learning modalities, what materials will students need on what days, who needs it where, and the general day-to-day planning that existed prior to COVID, the workload is unsustainable.

I like in my current experience to being before a live studio audience as a one-woman show with a new script written by me every day, as well as being my own camera woman and tech support for students and parents. This is what hybrid learning looks like. Understand that I'm not complaining because during a pandemic, this is what I need to do for my students and their families.

I know, however that none of what I do for my remote students takes the place of being here at school. Nothing about remote learning has proven to be better than in-person instruction --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interruption, you're coming up on the time limit, if you don't mind summarizing it.

JEN PHIPPEN: I'm going to speak towards the end. It seems to me that with SB 977, only --it only serves to encourage the continuance of remote learning. And I ask why when we know it's not the best means of instruction, why would we spend any time effort or resources spent figuring out the best way to have consistent remote learning practices and curriculum when we should be spending all of our time and effort on in-school post pandemic learning

including having extra staffing for small group instruction, social workers, school psychologists.

If this Committee feels the need to redefine online learning for those students and parents who may want to continue, I would ask you to consider providing an online Connecticut sponsored curriculum that is run by the state, not individual districts. It could be overseen by state hired teachers who are willing to be remote only. It would bring the consistency across the state when it comes to virtual teaching and learning, and a better alternative to having districts continue to offer online options.

Certainly, in this model, geography would not be taken into account when we're talking about virtual school. In closing, online instruction is not best practice. Online instruction mixed with in-person instruction is not a reasonable expectation for teachers or students. When a teacher's responsible for essentially two different classrooms simultaneously, neither group gets the best possible instruction.

If there is a belief that online instruction should be available, then please keep the two platforms separate. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none. Who do you have next? Thank you again, Jen, for your testimony.

JEN PHIPPEN: Thank you so much. And thank you for all you do.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Sanchez, you're muted.



REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Megan Osimanti or Osimanti.

MEGAN OSIMANTI: Hi. Thank you. Can you hear me now?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes,

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We can hear you.

MEGAN OSIMANTI: Okay. Perfect. Sorry about this afternoon. So, I too am from the Richfield Public Schools, much like Jen before me. I teach at the high school level, however, and I really appreciate you all hearing my experiences and counting them in your consideration towards SB 977 AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

Last March, when COVID emerged, suddenly education was faced with so many variables. Everyone was thrown into a scenario that was hasty, unfamiliar, and scary. We were literally assembling the plane in midair and it was a time of great trial and tribulation. However, since last March educators have evolved a lot and have learned so much more about what works and does not work for learning in this new educational landscape.

I believe that no matter how much better the public health situation becomes education is forever change. Well, there are a lot of advantages to what has evolved regarding the ability to interact with students in a digital environment, the truth is that there are more disadvantages than advantages. Problems exist with access, equity, engagement, and accountability.

When schools are deemed safe enough for students to be there at full capacity, distance learning should not be an open option for students to

still access. I've seen both sides of what occurs when students are at home. My own children try to access other entertaining devices like their phones, they're a Nintendo Switches, et cetera, out of view of their teachers on screen.

They often hold on to questions or concerns about what they are learning, avoiding what they determined to be awkward unmuting options. Their teachers sometimes aren't able to respond to a chat message or email in real time and then they're left to move on without clarity. All of these situations would be non-existent in a physical class setting where students could easily call out to a teacher, whisper to a classmate, or look around at their peers to see what they're doing.

As an educator --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, you're coming up on the time limit.

MEGAN OSIMANTI: I have experienced students struggling with the nuances of distance learning. I spend a lot of time tracking students down encouraging them to be involved in collaborative activities. They encounter Wi-Fi issues, hardware issues that I'm unable to support them with. All of this takes away from the learning.

Well, social interactions in high schools are not always positive. The daily interactions of a school create a learning ground for young adults to learn and to navigate the social world that they will soon traverse on their own. As a mother, I know that my children complain and grumble about things they don't like and I know that my students are the same. What I know to be true of these children is that they are children and they need adults to

see the bigger picture and make decisions for them that challenge them and push them out of their comfort zones.

I anticipate that there will be difficulty in getting some students back into schools now that this model has become their normal. Schools will need to navigate many obstacles in our post COVID normal, but just like we believe that we need to challenge kids instructionally. We need to see the clear truth in our purpose overall. Students grow through their experiences with other humans, exposure to new environments, physical movement, and the shared culture and goals of a school community in which they belong.

I implore the legislators and Members of this Committee to understand that schools are the best safest and most effective place for the youth of our society. As an educator, I believe hybrid learning has --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Megan, can you -- Megan, can you please summarize?

MEGAN OSIMANTI: Done.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Bam. There you go. Any questions for Megan?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't -- I don't see. No hands raised.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Megan.

MEGAN OSIMANTI: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Scarlett Lewis and I'm just wanting to say ahead of time, we do have a phone number, just the phone number

posted, whoever that is, if you want to be heard, please let our Clerk know because they haven't been responding, but right now, Scarlett Lewis looks like the last person.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Scarlett, you're up.

SCARLETT LEWIS: I'm last, last but not least. Okay. Thank you so much. Good after -- good evening. Thanks to all of you who have maintained your education focus, social and emotional learning in particular, and also supported me on my journey since the tragedy at Sandy Hook to those I've worked with and those I have yet to.

Congratulations again and shout out to Rochelle Brown Teacher of the Year. I just wanted to add my voice to those promoting house Bill 6557, which constitutes forward movement in our education system, promoting social and emotional learning in schools statewide. I'm excited for Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker's leadership, as I know she understands the essential value of SEL for our children, parents, and community.

A year now of social distancing is added to the already epidemic levels of mental health issues. Our children and their parents are facing for my isolation and fear. I support getting kids back into schools it's absolutely necessary and as soon as possible. The most important thing we do here today is discussed social and emotional learning and the importance of this focus on our education system.

Also, a huge positive is increasing the number of staff for mental health in schools. This Bill does a good job of moving us in the right direction. Some of you know, me and my life's mission since the murder of my six-year-old

son, Jesse McCord Lewis at Sandy Hook Elementary School alongside 19 of his classmates, six educators, and two additional victims of the system.

It's been eight years that brings us to this day. With this Bill in front of us, I know this would have saved my son's life and can reduce and prevent so much suffering by addressing the cause of the issues rather than chasing after it always a step behind the increasing dysfunction.

SEL is the number one way to have safe schools by reducing and preventing grievances that can escalate into attacks. That is why the comprehensive year-long lifespan SEL programming I launched with educators in Connecticut five years ago called Choose Love Movement is now being taught in over 10,000 schools, homes, and communities in every state, including throughout Connecticut --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, Scarlett, you're coming up on the time limit, if you don't mind summarizing it.

SCARLETT LEWIS: Completely free the programs themselves don't have to cost a lot of money. I am a proponent of the Bill. Really good work. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Scarlett. Any questions for Scarlett? I see Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Scarlett, thank you for hanging in to the bitter end. I want to shout you out as somebody that I recognize and everybody should recognize as sort of you know, Connecticut's, maybe United States' mother of social, emotional learning and to know how comfortable

you are with this Bill. It means that we're on the right track. So, I have nothing but the utmost respect for you and your efforts and good Bill ought to pass. So, thank you so much for everything that you do.

SCARLETT LEWIS: Thank you so much, Mitch, for all your work as well throughout the years. Thank you.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's all I have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Any other questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Just very quickly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too wanted to welcome Scarlett here and just really thank you so much for all the work you have done Scarlett throughout the state. I know it's due to a large part to your efforts and what you have taught that we are here today, talking about social, emotional learning, and making it a very high priority to meet the mental health needs of our students.

So, I want to recognize you, and when you have a moment, if you would go through the Bill and send in what your recommendations are for any type of improvement, with a particular focus on looking at what we can do more in the school model with involving the community and the family support, so that all of our parents are also engaged. But again, thank you so much for all your work Scarlett.

SCARLETT LEWIS: Thank you. Thank you very much. That means a lot to me. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other, any other questions or comments from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any other hands raised. Thank you, Scarlett for the work you do.

SCARLETT LEWIS: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Scarlett.

SCARLETT LEWIS: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing no more. Do we have any more people in the room, Bob?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There's one person, but they're -- I guess they're not responding.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): The telephone number is just off. There's no name attached, so. I guess we can move out.

LUZ OSUBA: Mr. Chair, I can move them forward and you can ask them to unmute themselves.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes. I mean, sitting in there, so move them in and let's see. I don't see it yet.

LUZ OSUBA: No, they just left.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): They left. Okay. So, we're done.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I will, again, I want to thank everyone on the Committee. You guys who's hung in the area since 10 o'clock and everyone else who came in and out, because I know there's a lot of other meetings going on. You guys know the education is probably the most important Committee that we have at Capitol. That's why all our public hearings last at least eight, nine hours.

But it is our responsibility to listen to the public so we can make good decisions because we're affecting their children's lives. So again, I want to thank every Member of this Committee for staying here, listening intently, asking very good questions, and representing the community, the education community very well. Thank you again.

Luz, will get something out and let you guys know what our next public hearing and also, when we have our screening. All right, thank you again. Bye-bye.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. This public hearing is adjourned.