

Testimony to the Education Committee
Re SB 1, AAC Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools
HB5321 AAC Certain Recommendations of the School Paraeducator Advisory Council
and HB 274, AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention
By Liz Dupont-Diehl, Special Projects Coordinator, CT Citizen Action Group
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Greetings, Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel and Rep. McCarty, and all the distinguished members of the Committee. I am Liz Dupont-Diehl; I live in Windsor and work for CT Citizen Action Group, which for 50 years has worked to change the relations of people to power in order to build a more just society. CCAG is a member of the Recovery for All coalition.

On behalf of CCAG and our thousands of members, I testify regarding SB 1, AAC Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools; HB 274, AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention; and 5321 AAC Certain Recommendations of the School Paraeducator Advisory Council.

CCAG has been working with families and advocates from around the state to ensure community input is maximized in how districts spend federal stimulus funding. We echo comments from others that education does not occur in a vacuum. Our students have for too long lived with severe inequities arising from communities shaped by structural racism, disparities in housing and income inequality. Connecticut is among the worst states nationally for [income inequality](#), and within Connecticut, there are staggering [disparities based on race in school spending](#). Just this weekend, we see that [“across Connecticut, 157 schools lack critical onsite health services, and even more lack mental health supports.”](#)

COVID has exacerbated these inequalities, leading to crisis-level needs for our students – and a corresponding crisis for the staff in schools working every day with inadequate resources to address them. Our hospital emergency rooms are flooded with requests for mental health services they cannot meet - and we know the most effective way to provide these services is within our schools.

Based on our statewide survey, and community and individual meetings, these twin crises demand a strong and immediate response. SB 1 is to be lauded for its provisions to provide needed resources and to quantify and track this support moving forward. We would urge the Committee to consider the need for permanent support for these services, and to include school counselors in the bill.

Re HB 274, AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention, we applaud the focus on the importance of minority teacher recruitment. A study of the issue is important but not sufficient. We urge you to maintain a sense of timeliness and urgency even while calling for a study of the issue.

Finally we support HB 5321, AAC AAC Certain Recommendations of the School Paraeducator Advisory Council, to support and reward the critical work being done by paraeducators, which increasingly important in the pandemic.

These bills are important opportunities to provide and to target resources to provide essential support and advance equity for our students. Thank you to the chairs and vice chairs and all the members of the committee for your service and for your time and attention today. I welcome any questions and we are happy to work with you on these bills.

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