

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5321

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING CERTAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

Title: PARAEDUCATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL.

Vote Date: 3/25/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/21/2022

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill requires local and regional boards of education to provide paraeducators with a program of professional development no fewer than eighteen hours in length. To that end, the bill also requires each local and regional board of education to establish a professional development and evaluation committee

Furthermore, the bill requires the Commissioner of Education to convene a working group to develop recommendations for the creation of a system of professional certification for paraeducators.

The bill also seeks to include paraprofessionals in any planning and placement team meetings for a child to whom they are assigned upon the request of a parent, guardian or surrogate parent.

The bill also requires the Department of Education to conduct an annual review of the health care plan options available to paraeducators. The Department of Education, based on their annual review of health care plan options, is required to develop an annual report on paraeducator health plans.

Lastly, the bill requires each local and regional board, on an annual basis, to submit a strategic school profile report to the Commissioner of Education with data related to paraeducators including; number of paraeducators employed, job titles, hourly rate of pay, total number of hours and days worked, health care contributions, and annual salary.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Education](#): “While we support paraeducators receiving this PD, we do not believe July 1, 2023, is a reasonable timeline to develop a professional development system for paraeducators and support the implementation of said system statewide. We would request for this timeline to be extended. This requirement will also create an unfunded mandate on districts and local boards of education who are resourced at different levels, to develop, implement and financially support a PD system for paraeducators including hourly rates for paraeducators to attend the PD. We believe this section also needs additional revision and would request ongoing conversations with legislators and the Paraeducator Council.”

[Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate, The Office of the Child Advocate](#): “H.B. 5321 implements the recommendations of the School Paraeducator Advisory Council, which OCA strongly supports. Paraprofessionals are the direct care providers who deliver first-hand instruction, care, nurturance, and guidance to our most vulnerable children. It is essential that paraprofessionals receive the respect, support, professional development, and pay! that they deserve to do this essential work, and that they are included as part of a child’s Individual Education Program meetings.”

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Travis Woodward, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001](#): “HB 5321 is a good step in improving the work life and career opportunities of Connecticut’s paraeducators. It will create meaningful systems for career and professional development, begin to make progress on the creation of a statewide certification system for paras, and make improvements to planning and placement team meetings by ensuring the inclusion of paras. But most of all: this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity they have earned and deserve.”

[Hyclis Williams, President, AFSCME Local 3429, New Haven Paraprofessionals](#): “It is important to know that Paraprofessionals in New Haven work alongside teachers serving as the backbone of teaching and learning. As Paraeducators we support children at their level of need, maintaining and facilitating a learning environment that supports the emotional, physical, and intellectual development of each child. However, we do not receive the same type of support from our employer. We are work under severe stress with little or no support.”

[Sherrie Weller, President, AFSCME Local 1522](#): “HB 5321 is a strong start toward improving work life and career opportunities for school paraprofessionals. However, the charge given to the School Paraeducator Advisory Council in developing legislative recommendations recognized the need to increase pay, lower healthcare costs, and improve retirement benefits.”

[Michelle Mania, President, AFSCME Local 1996](#): “I truly hope that you will implement HB 5321. This bill will help Paras like myself participate in professional development to broaden our skill sets but I hope that there will be deeper recommendations as well. WE all need to receive a salary, healthcare benefits and an actual retirement that allows us to stay at the jobs that we are so devoted and fond of. The last thing Paras want to do is to leave the children behind because we can’t make a fair living wage.”

[Carole Kerkin, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Capitol Region Education Council](#): “It is imperative that we “establish a system of professional development for paraeducators” as HB 5321 proposes. Many of these paraeducators are diamonds in the rough, future teachers in training. They should universally be afforded the same, or greater, opportunities than our certified teachers, to learn new skills and hone their craft.

[Jan Hochadel, President, AFT Connecticut](#): “We are in favor of Raised Bill 5321 as written. Paraeducators do need professional development that is aimed at the unique requirement of their job, and too often they are asked to attend PD that is aimed exclusively at teachers. AFT CT must be clear, however: this bill is a disappointingly tentative first step in the process needed to ensure that our schools provide paraeducators the respect and compensation for the critical role they play in the education of our children. Policy makers of Connecticut must take a far more thorough look at the investment our state and our towns make in the critical role paraeducators play in the lives of our children than this bill provides.”

[Stacie Harris-Byrdsong, Secretary, AFSCME Council 4](#): “Paraeducators need your help, they need your support and they need you to make brave choices to not just stop here, although this is a very, important first step. We need you to take a look at all the important recommendations the Council made around wages, health care and an opportunity to retire with dignity after a lifetime of dedication to students we love.”

[Andrew A. Feinstein, Legislative Chair, Special Education Equity for Kids](#): “H.B. 5321 implements the recommendations of the School Paraeducator Advisory Council. Paraprofessionals are at the very core of the special education system of the state. A good paraprofessional can empower a student to great success while a weak or poorly trained paraprofessional can hold a student back. SEEK endorses the training requirements in the bill and fully supports the participation of paraeducators at PPT meetings. The working group created in section 5 of the bill needs to include a representative of SEEK or another organization representing the interests of students with disabilities.”

[Sheryl Elliot, Vice President, AFSCME Local 2267](#): “House Bill 5321 is a good step in improving the work life and career opportunities of paraeducators. It will create meaningful systems for career and professional development; begin to make progress on the creation of a statewide certification system for paras; and make improvements to planning and placement team meetings by ensuring the inclusion of paras.”

[Liz Dupont-Diehl, Special Projects Coordinator, CT Citizen Action Group](#): “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.”

[Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President, Connecticut Education Association](#): “Paraeducators play an important role in our classroom days and serve as an additional educator in the classroom. Because of the importance of their role, it is critical for paraeducators to be provided dynamic and strong professional development opportunities, higher salaries, better benefits, as well as equal care and treatment as teachers. CEA Supports proposals consistent with the Para-advisory council’s recommendations, such as those extending professional development and IEP participation to paraeducators.”

[Shellye Davis, Executive Vice President, Connecticut AFL-CIO](#): “Thank you for raising HB 5321 and including three of the report’s recommendations: (1) establishing a clear professional development plan and structure for paraeducators; (2) creating a working group to explore a certification program for paraeducators; and (3) making common sense changes that allow paraeducators to attend PPT meetings and have access to student IEPs. They are steps in the right direction, but if I’m being honest with you, it’s not enough.”

[Carl Chisem, President, Municipal Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 506](#): “HB 5321 is a good step in improving the work life and career opportunities of Connecticut’s paraeducators. It will create meaningful systems for career and professional development, begin to make progress on the creation of a statewide certification system for paraeducators, and make improvements to planning and placement team meetings by ensuring their inclusion.. But most of all: this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity they have earned.”

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Tricia Santos, Representative, AFSCME Council 4](#): “A more comprehensive bill that includes all recommendations from the paraeducator advisory council would be a better approach and would show that paras are valued and appreciated for the work we do. We’ve spent the last 2 years helping students adjust to very difficult challenges and deal with Covid. Yet, we are met with thanks and a proposal for training but not economic help or equity for paras. We need a bill that would include recommendations to lower health care costs, create better pay for paras, and will improve their lives significantly.”

All other testimony can be found on the [CGA website](#).

Reported by: Matthew Boucher

Date: 03/29/22