Testimony on H.B. 6884
March 14, 2023

To the members of the hearing committee:

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony. My name is Drew Michael McWeeney, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Education at the University of Hartford, as well as a Professor of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Central Connecticut State University where I also supervise student teachers.

I am writing to support **HB 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention, and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession**.

As you are well aware, our teacher shortage in Connecticut is at crisis-levels. Specifically, at CCSU, the enrollment in many of our undergraduate and graduate courses have dropped more than fifty percent (50%) since 2016. However, over the last decade, this state has made it more difficult to become a public school teacher by increasing the requirements for teacher certification.

As a former public school preschool special education classroom teacher of 5 years, I understand and recognize how hard I worked and sacrificed family time to ensure that students had quality instruction from me daily. All the nights working until 8 P.M. were worth it since every day, I would have families thanking me for the growth their children have made in my classroom. Wouldn't it be nice if every teacher worked just as hard as I did?

The answer: They would, because this bill would show teachers they are valued and willing to work hard since the state would be incentivizing teacher productivity.

I would like to support two crucial pieces of this legislation.

First, I strongly know, regardless of what supporters of EdTPA say, that the EdTPA is the most important direct cause of our university's drop in enrollment in teacher education. Since I was the first cohort in Connnecticut to take the EdTPA, I have pointed out that the only people in Connecticut who publicly support the edTPA are those evil people like Michael Alfano from Sacred Heart University who have been either paid consultants for Pearson-Scale or hold positions of employment that are dependent upon EdTPA implementation (in that example, he is an educational administrator). Given this context, no one can deny that millions of dollars are at stake in the decision.

So to what degree is EdTPA supported by any evidence or empirical research?

Unlike the handful of EdTPA supporters who claim that the assessment is "valid and reliable," yet never back up their opinions with evidence, I will summarize all peer-reviewed studies on EdTPA in the scientific educational literature *with respect to how it affects university student teaching supervisors* such as myself.

Note: This review does not contain any "research" that is produced by Pearson-Scale, as these reports contain obvious conflicts of interest and are not held up to the academic standards of peer review.

As of 2022, there are thirty-six (36) full text, peer-reviewed journal articles published on "EdTPA" in the EBSCOhost database, an international database containing research from the top academic journals in the field of education. Only four out of the 36 studies found positive results associated with the edTPA.

It should be noted that the authors in three of those four studies disclosed financial ties associated with organizations responsible for promoting EdTPA (such as Pearson-Scale). Regardless, only eleven percent (11%) of all published, peer-reviewed articles are supportive of edTPA as a requirement for teaching licensure.

With respect to how it affects university supervisors, none found positive results.

1. "Structurally, edTPA puts significant economic pressures on the university, professors, supervisors, and PSTs, and opens the door to privatized alternative certification routes as the back-up if and when programs do not ratchet up to escalating standards (p.33) ... "edTPA should not be allowed to (re)configure how we use time as an educational resource" (p.35). (Sherfinski, Hayes, Zhang, 2019) – *Education Policy Analysis Archives*

2. "... tenure-track faculty and university supervisors viewed edTPA's standards as a mark of diminished professional status—requiring the ceding of judgment, discretion, and autonomy in the name of reform." (Cohen et al., 2019, p.21). – *Journal of Teacher Education*

3. "As supervisors, we became part of our candidates' transaction towards certification. Because of the edTPA, our candidates now view us as arbitrators who could just help them align themselves and their work to edTPA's specifications." (Donovan, & Cannon, 2018, p. 28) - *Education Policy Analysis Archive*

4. This study suggests "early implementation of the edTPA as a licensure requirement … did constrict the potential for university supervisors to help student teachers learn to teach during student teaching." (Clayton, 2018, p.119) - *Teacher Education Quarterly*

5. "... many of these tensions (associated with edTPA), and the process of adapting to them, had more to do with university supervisors managing the technical and administrative demands of the assessment than authenticating or improving teaching practice." (Meuwissen & Choppin, 2016) - *Education Policy Analysis Archives*

6. "(Adam) received glowing reviews on all program assessments, including 12 clinical observations and first-hand evaluations by his principal and other teachers in the building ..." and still failed edTPA (Kuranishi & Olyer, 2017) – T*eacher Education & Special Education*

7. “Teacher candidates also lamented missing out on the opportunity to practice and be supported through the seminar on other key competencies that they had learned about in prior coursework because the edTPA told them what to do and not their university supervisors ...” (Bacon & Blachman, 2017) - *Teacher Education & Special Education*

In addition to this review, in my professional judgment, the main issue with EdTPA is that it is not aligned to the Common Core of Teaching (CCCT) Rubric. Because of this, it makes it hard for student teachers to properly-align teaching practices that their districts and universities are expecting them to in conjunction with something completely different that EdTPA requires student teachers to do.

Second, this bill would require play-based learning (PBL) to be incorporate in both preschool and kindergarten and in grades 1-5. All the existing research in the early childhood education profession from both the academic, philosophical journals and trade, practitioner journals overwhelmingly indicate that the biggest indicator of a child’s success in their adult life is their ability to play.

Specifically, Jean Piaget said that: “Play is the work of the children.”

As a Ph.D. candidate who is currently studying play, I have a few points:

1. By definition, play is voluntary, child-led and pleasurable. Play has no structure.

2. Play is how babies, toddlers, preschool-age, and kindergarten children are wired to process stress and anxiety. Babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarteners who play all day with no bounds have a stronger internal locus-of-control, which leads to feeling more secure, a sense of strength, and perseverance.

3. Play is the healthiest thing we can do for our babies, toddlers, preschoolers and kindergarteners. How can we expect our children to learn to perform difficult and long tasks under pressure throughout their life when they can not even engage in opportunities that will help them learn how to activate their executive functioning so they can use that when performing such tasks?

4. Children have a right, by law, to play. When we take that right away from them, we strip them of their right to live. Article 28 of the United Nations Constitution indicates this point-blank. Our Constitution is outdated and needs to be revised to include play being a right for ALL children.

This does not mean we abandon all structure and routines. It just means that we need to allow play to be the only thing that matters in the lives of our babies, toddlers, preschoolers and kindergarteners especially in the public school. Children can not even socialize with other children anymore, especially due to COVID, where for two years, early childhood education meant learning isolated at home.

In conclusion, here are my solutions:

1. Eliminate the EdTPA

Stop reinventing the wheel. Let's use the CCCT Rubric to evaluate student teachers. We would have to modify it appropriately so it can reflect student teaching, which is also different from teaching full time as a paid employee in a school district. This would allow student teachers to have a clearer understanding of the teacher evaluation system that their district administrators will be using to evaluate their their teaching, and it will lesson the time and cost of professional development that school districts have to give for first-year or new-to-the-district teachers because student teachers will already be familiar and know how to use the CCCT rubric. While this assessment still becomes rigorous because student teachers need to be assessed, the assessment becomes more meaningful.

Meaningless assessments such as EdTPA makes teaching meaningless because teaching becomes compounded. Why assess student teachers using a tool such as EdTPA that is not even used by public school district administrators when evaluating teachers? The state puts trust in student teaching supervisors like myself to ensure student teachers are well prepared to enter the profession. EdTPA is a way of telling people like me: "We don't trust you to do the right thing."

2. Get play unstructured play back in preschools and kindergarten

Even saying "play-based learning" is a stretch because then there is an academic component to play. Again, play is not academic. Simply put, the minute we expect a 4 or 5 year old to complete an academic task: It becomes child abuse. If school administrators refuse to bring back genuine, authentic play like the old days of sandboxes all day long, then they should be charged with child abuse and neglect and go on the Department of Children and Families (DCF) child abuse and neglect registry so they can never work in education again or have children of their own. We are abusing children when we take their right to play away from them.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote "yes" to **HB 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession**.

As I always say: Policy should avoid perpetuating this process.

Respectfully submitted,

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