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*Testimony of*

*Michele Ridolfi O'Neill,*

**Connecticut Education Association**

Before the

**Higher Education Committee**

**Re:**

**SB 932 AA CONCERNING AN ALLIANCE DISTRICT TEACHER LOAN SUBSIDY PROGRAM**

**SB 953 AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE LEARN, WORK, PAY PROGRAM**

March 3, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and members of the Higher Education Committee. My name is Michele Ridolfi O'Neill, and I serve as the Educational Issues Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents active, aspiring, and retired educators from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA recognizes that student debt is a ubiquitous problem, and we thank this committee for raising two bills that will help Connecticut students to tackle this real and pervasive issue.

CEA supports **SB 932 AAC An Alliance District Teacher Loan Subsidy Program** and **SB 953 AA Establishing the Learn, Work, Pay Program**,

CEA regularly conducts informational sessions on federal student loan forgiveness and repayment options for educators through a program we call *Degrees Not Debt*. We deliver these workshop sessions in partnership with Cambridge Credit Counseling. Attracting aspiring educators into the teaching profession and helping new educators to pursue public service while affording to make ends meet are important goals of CEA.

Regarding SB 932, CEA is in support of loan subsidies to alleviate the financial burden of student loan interest on teachers in alliance districts. We know that working in these schools can be challenging, and CEA supports providing teachers with tangible incentives for accepting and committing to such a challenge.

In our review of the proposal, we recognize the value of attracting new teachers to Alliance Districts, particularly as the state encourages more people of color to choose a career in teaching. To ensure that the potential success of the program results in Alliance Districts employing, and having a good balance of experience, we suggest the possibility that similar subsidies be considered for teachers who are parents with PLUS loans. Together, such incentives could attract more diverse and experienced teachers to Alliance Districts.

Regarding SB 953, the proposed Learn, Work, Pay program would encourage college graduates to remain in Connecticut, and would also help our state attract and retain new teachers.

Once again, we thank you for raising these bills and appreciate this opportunity to comment.

