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Testimony of  
**Brendan Murphy**  
**Connecticut Education Association**

Before the  
**Education Committee**

Re:  
**SB 976 AAC Special Education**

**March 8, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Brendan Murphy and I am a union representative for the Connecticut Education Association. I am currently an organizer/trainer representing 33 local associations in 4 counties. Prior to my past 5 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 SB976 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, this has actually happened to me.

At CEA we have recently compiled a committee of special educators from across the state that represent service providers from pre-k through students age 21. This group is tasked with creating reasonable limits that take into consideration intensities of various services, the amount of time students' IEP indicate as classroom inclusionary time, and other key factors. Over the past 5 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 SDE concerning caseload limits.

As special education budgets are cut and special education teachers caseloads continue to rise, students' learning conditions deteriorate. Additionally, schools' abilities to address underlying trauma from adverse childhood experiences that may be affecting special education students is getting compromised causing students to endure unnecessary trauma. This during a time of pandemic when students' emotional needs are more demanding than ever.

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 of our concerns.

