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Testimony of

Orlando J. Rodriguez

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Education Committee

Re:

SB 945 AA IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

HB 6535 AAC ISSUES RELATING TO SCHOOL SECURITY

March 3, 2021

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez, and I serve as the Research and Policy Development Specialist of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents tens of thousands of active and retired educators from all areas of Connecticut.

Today, I am testifying in support of SB 945 and HB 6535.

SB 945

The population of English Learners is increasing throughout Connecticut. We applaud the Connecticut State Department of Education for recommending changes to bilingual certification that will increase the pool of current teachers certified to teach bilingual courses.

While bilingual education teachers are not paid more than their peers, it does cost them an additional year of college expenses to obtain bilingual certification. We recommend the state fully-fund the added 5th year of in-state college costs for students in traditional teacher preparation programs to become certified in bilingual education.

Separately, we are encouraged that this bill allows the Connecticut State Department of Education to institute a civil action and receive damages from Charter Management Organizations that have misused taxpayer monies. Several charter school scandals in Connecticut may have been avoided had the proposed legislation already been law.

We also recommend that the committee consider clarifying that [Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-4b \(2019\)](#), the statutory accountability of schools receiving taxpayers' dollars, does in fact apply to charter schools. A decision released by the State Department of Education in 2016 took the position that [Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-4b](#) cannot be used to hold charter schools accountable. We vigorously disagree with this position and seek its clarification. Parents, students, and taxpayers should have recourse to the State Board of Education accountability process used to hold boards of education accountable.

CEA also recommends additional legislation to make charter schools as accountable as other publicly funded schools in Connecticut. State charter schools are publicly funded *choice* schools that can send a student back to their local or regional public school just because they think the child does not "fit-in" or does not perform or behave according to some subjective criteria. This is a troubling trend, particularly among charter schools operated by charter management organizations.

Other choice programs cannot do this, and should not. These include Open Choice (a.k.a. state-wide interdistrict public school attendance program), magnets, and the governor's new proposed program (i.e., [SB 886](#)) that allows students from Danbury or Norwalk to enroll in a surrounding school district.

[SB 886: An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education](#)

“School districts which received students from Danbury and Norwalk under the pilot program during the school year commencing July 1, 2022, shall allow such students to attend school in the district until they graduate from high school.”

[Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-76d, regarding special education](#)

“The obligation of the school district under this subsection shall terminate when such child is graduated from high school or reaches age twenty-one, whichever occurs first.”

[Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-264l, regarding magnet schools](#)

“All interdistrict magnet schools shall be operated in conformance with the same laws and regulations applicable to public schools.”

[Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-266aa, regarding Open Choice schools](#)

“Each receiving district shall allow out-of-district students it accepts to attend school in the district until they graduate from high school.”

SB 6535

Thank you for your desire to make K-12 education in Connecticut even better and the many hours you dedicate to that task.