

*Testimony of*

***Donald Williams***

***Connecticut Education Association***

*Before a meeting of the*

**Education Committee**

*Re:*

**SB 1 An Act Concerning Transparency in Education**

*March 8, 2023*

Representative Currey, Senator McCrory, and members of the committee. My name is Donald Williams, and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), representing educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA supports **SB 1 and requests that important additions** be made to this legislation.

We respectfully ask committee members to ensure that the education profession is among the most highly valued and supported in our state. The need is clear from persistent educator shortages in many schools, alarming numbers of educated, experienced professionals leaving the field, and declining numbers of students entering the profession.

Specifically, unfilled teaching positions exceed 1,200, and nearly three out of four teachers in Connecticut are planning to leave the profession early. From the fall of 2015-2016 to June 2020-2021, the total number of graduates who completed teacher preparation programs declined from 2,132 to 1,788. That is a drop of 344 completions, or 16 percent, over five years.

In 1986, with Republican majorities in the House and Senate, and a Democrat as governor, Connecticut passed the Education Enhancement Act, which included \$300 million for teacher salaries and class size reduction. That is equal to \$800 million in today's dollars.

It is time for the legislature to pass a landmark Education Advancement and Innovation Act that addresses the critical issues affecting schools today by:

1. Reducing class sizes;
2. Providing starting salaries for teachers at 3.25 times the federal poverty level for a family of two;

3. Providing salary increases in line with similarly educated professionals;
4. Offering incentives to attract students into education preparation programs and free public university tuition for required professional-level credits; and
5. Requiring an audit of the amount of funding and resources, including time, expended for statewide standardized mastery testing.

These investments will signal that Connecticut is a destination for educators, where we believe in and support their work. Establishing a loan subsidy program that includes educators is one of many strategies that should be implemented. In addition to loan subsidy programs, CEA is advocating for several different ways within the purview of this committee to address the teacher shortage.

At a time when the state is experiencing unprecedented budget surpluses, there is an opportunity to deposit \$100 million of the surplus into an interest-bearing fund for public institutions of higher education. This public fund would be akin to an endowment that could be dedicated to supporting incentives such as tuition-free teacher preparation programs for aspiring educators. Such a fund could also enhance retention by helping to offset tuition costs for coursework that teachers are required to take in order to remain in the profession.

As an alternative to an increase in the budget, a similar use of surplus could help address the five points listed above. We support flexible ways of accomplishing critical goals to bolster public education. The priority at this moment is that decisive action must be taken to provide real resources and financial commitments—for the specific purposes listed above—to our public schools.

SB 1, which requires transparency in the challenges we face and the means to address those challenges, is a good vehicle for these dramatic steps forward. We appreciate your consideration and support. Thank you.