

*Testimony of*

***Joslyn DeLancey***

***Connecticut Education Association***

*Before the*

*Education Committee*

*Re*

***SB 1166 An Act Concerning Implementation of the Connecticut School Climate Policy***

***HB 6845 An Act Establishing a State-Wide Book Gifting Program and Home Reading Grant Program for Children***

*March 8, 2023*

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Joslyn DeLancey, and I am the vice president of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA helps active and retired teachers across the state advocate for students, teachers, and public schools. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of **SB 1166 AAC Implementation of the Connecticut School Climate Policy** with some amendments for your consideration. I am also testifying today in support of **HB 6845 AA Establishing a State-wide Book Gifting Program and Home Reading Grant Program for Children**.

#### **SB 1166 AAC Implementation of the Connecticut School Climate Policy**

The state Social Emotional Learning School Climate Advisory Collaborative has been working over the past two years to reflect upon Connecticut's current statutes regarding bullying prevention and school climate and culture. The Collaborative has also been keeping apprised of best practices in social-emotional learning and restorative practices. One common theme of our Collaborative's discussion has been that current statutes and definitions hinder a district's ability to truly respond to bullying incidents in a meaningful way. Process and compliance usurp districts' efforts to provide restorative and proactive strategies that can ensure positive, supportive, and thriving school climates.

SB 1166 aims to prevent bullying and establish healthier, more successful school climates. School districts face the challenge of providing safe and supportive school climates when the children enrolling in our schools exhibit greater socio-economic and mental health needs. School district leadership needs to reflect upon and assess the resources, processes, and strategies it uses to meet students' needs and the impact they have on the culture of their schools. Implementing the goal of HB 1166 is critical toward enabling district leaders to focus on the culture and climate of their schools by removing time-intensive and often ineffective measures currently in statute.

While we support this bill, we would recommend making some changes to the definition of the word "bullying." The current proposal states that bullying is an "abuse of power within the school environment...." This definition can be limiting in that not all bullying falls along the lines of defined

power relationships that the term "abuse of power" implies – bullying can occur between peers where there is not a power imbalance.

As committee members refine HB 1166, we ask that you consider clarifying a definition that states that *"bullying means behavior that is intimidating or threatening to others within the school environment, as an educational institution and workplace, and may include cyberbullying and teen dating violence. Bullying may involve individuals or groups of students or adults."*

Other than this particular suggestion, we are excited to see this committee reviewing SB 1166 and know that its passing would lead to healthier and safer school climates across the state.

### **HB 6845 AA Establishing a State-wide Book Gifting Program and Home Reading Grant Program for Children**

I would also like to comment in support of HB 6845. It is timely that this bill comes before the Education Committee as CEA members, along with CEA's charitable arm, the Connecticut Education Foundation (CEF), read in front of thousands of first- and second-graders participating in the weeklong program Read Across America. CEA and CEF's efforts provide children with the opportunity to select a new, free book of their choice to take home, along with bookmarks, reading certificates, word searches, and a flyer for parents with tips on engaging children in reading at home.

CEA supports HB 6845 and believes that it would advance the same goal of promoting literacy for all students in the early grades.

Thank you for your consideration and your tireless work on this committee.