*Testimony of*

**Kate Dias** **& Joslyn DeLancey**

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*

**Appropriations Committee**

*Re:*

SB 50 ANACT CONCERNING EXCLUSION OF AID TO DISTRESSED MUNICIPALITIES FROM THE SPENDING CAP

SB 377 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHERS’ RETIREMENT BOARD’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES TO THE TEACHERS’ RETIREMENT SYSTEM STATUTES

March 15, 2024

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Nuccio, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kate Dias, and I am President of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 40,000 active teachers and through our CEA-Retired group, we also represent more than 5,000 retired teachers.

CEA testifies in support of SB 50. We also testify in support of Sections 1-5 of SB 377 and supportive of the intent of Section 6 regarding TRB elections and request that it further addresses inconsistencies in the electoral process for TRB members. Comments specific to Section 6 are below.

**SB 50 AAC Exclusion of Aid to Distressed Municipalities from the Spending Cap**

CEA supports the provision in SB 50 to exclude statutory grants to Distressed Municipalities from calculations of the state’s funding cap. While the spending cap is well intentioned, it establishes artificial barriers to providing sufficient funding to school districts where student need is the greatest – the districts that correspond to those on the Distressed Municipalities list.

As the needs of the state’s student population intensify, school districts must reduce class sizes, attract and retain more teachers, hire professional staff to provide behavioral and mental health support, and provide additional critical resources. The state’s spending cap should not stand in the way.

**SB 377 AAC the Teachers' Retirement Board's Recommendations for Changes to the Teachers' Retirement System Statutes**

CEA supports the goal Section 5 to align the date of elections of all TRB members to July, which will reduce the costs, administrative burdens, and potential confusion associated with running two elections months apart. We ask that attention also be given to ensuring that the initial 4-year terms that are set to run to October 2027 terminate with the new election date of July 2027. As currently drafted, SB 377 does not appear to address this.

Additionally, our retired members of have voiced concerns with a provision passed last year that broke with the remaining statute by making two of the four elected retirees voted upon only by retirees. We request that this section of the statute be revised to align the election of the new retiree members to the existing democratic process whereby all those with a stake in the retirement system have equal votes.

For the purpose of background, last session, the legislature increased the number of retirees elected to the TRB by two. As a result of last year’s passage, the TRB consists of 4 elected teacher retirees, 4 elected active teachers, and 8 seats that are chosen by the Governor through appointments and ex officio membership. All of which are voting members (see table below).

CEA supported this increase, which helps ensure that those who are most vested in the stability, solvency, and longevity of the Teachers Retirement System – active and retired teachers – have an equal voice in the decisions of the TRB.

**TRB Board Composition (4 year terms)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Members** (all have voting rights) | **Nominated By** | **Elected by** |
| State Treasurer | ex officio | NA |
| OPM Secretary | ex officio | NA |
| Commissioner of Education | ex officio | NA |
| Chief Elected Municipal Officer | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1991) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Active Teacher (2011 – Union Member) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |

CEA and CEA-Retired urge members to align the elections to July and to restore the full democratic electoral process for members to serve on the TRB.