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Testimony of

**Kate Dias & Joslyn DeLancey  
Connecticut Education Association**

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 1458 AAC CHANGES TO THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS AND  
ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAMS**

**HB 5001 AAC THE QUALITY AND DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES  
IN CONNECTICUT**

**HB 7167 AAC EDUCATION FUNDING**

**HB 7168 AAC TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

**HB 7169 AA ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO STUDY THE INCORPORATION OF  
CONNECTICUT'S CULTURAL RESOURCES WITH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING**

**March 12, 2025**

Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee. We are Kate Dias, President, and Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), which represents educators in over 150 school districts across the state. Today we are submitting testimony on various bills noted below.

## **SB 1458 AAC CHANGES TO THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS AND ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAMS**

CEA supports the concept of reducing excessive hurdles for districts to receive state funds. While each program would benefit from review and revisions, it is premature to enact SB 1458 while we await the State Department of Education's expected report on Alliance Districts in January 2026.

The Alliance District program and Commissioner's Network Schools program each require that detailed plans be submitted to the state in exchange for funds. In the case of Alliance Districts, the state requires the 36 Alliance School Districts to submit these plans in order to receive new ECS funds (a requirement not applied to all other recipients of ECS funds). Schools participating in the commissioner's program become eligible by being among the lowest-performing schools on statewide accountability measures. Once identified, the awarding of new grant funding becomes contingent on schools completing extensive planning, and, if necessary, impact bargaining with affected collective bargaining groups.

Both programs were created nearly 15 years ago within the context of the outdated No Child Left Behind Act, and to some degree, the Race to the Top program. Each would benefit from review, revision, and input from educators into the strategies schools and districts would implement to enhance teaching and learning.

While we are pleased to see language in SB 1459 providing " ... secure school-level flexibility and autonomy for the schools," it comes with the caveat "... in exchange for heightened accountability." It is yet unclear what this would mean for teachers and students. The bill also reduces the number of Alliance Districts by more than half without addressing the impact, fiscally and otherwise, on districts no longer identified.

Consequently, CEA does not support SB 1458 at this time.

## **HB 5001 AAC THE QUALITY AND DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT**

HB 5001 rightly spotlights special education this session. Special education services in Connecticut are severely strained. The number of students identified as requiring services has been climbing as shortages of certified special educators and paraeducators have been growing. The ratio of students to teachers in special education settings is becoming untenable. Caseloads and workloads for teachers and the related administrative burden and paperwork mounts. Meanwhile, funding fails to keep pace with needs.

CEA welcomes the opportunity to weigh in on legislation such as HB 5001 and other vehicles to improve the provision of special education services to children in the state.

## **HB 7167 AAC EDUCATION FUNDING**

CEA is generally supportive of the provisions in this bill that lift all boats. Magnet, charter, and agricultural-technical schools will see an annual increase in funding if their student enrollment

increases or remains unchanged. Given the current circumstances, we also support hold-harmless provisions that prevent decreases in school funding year to year.

We also aspire for the state to maintain a cost-sharing formula that is up to date and accounts for the changing costs of schooling. Currently, the base factor in the ECS formula, or the “foundation” that essentially represents the general per-pupil cost for providing public education, is significantly outdated. CEA has long advocated for the foundation to be pegged to true costs that change over time or an inflationary factor. We oppose the removal of the hold-harmless provision until the state can fund an ECS formula that accounts for changing costs over time.

## **HB 7168 AAC TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

CEA supports HB 7168, which includes innovative approaches, such as scholarships and tuition assistance programs, for attracting more young adults into careers as educators. CEA supports the proposal's inclusion of a specific revenue source to fund these important initiatives, with the recommendation that Cannabis funds set-aside for social equity be reserved for that purpose and other Cannabis revenues be tapped to fund education initiatives such as these.

As this bill progresses through the legislative process, we ask that you consider additional strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers. To that end we share with you CEA's comprehensive Policy Brief on Teacher Recruitment and Retention. Our brief provides over 30 policy recommendations, including 15 specifically addressing higher education, diversity, teacher preparation, and the educator pipeline. Please click here to download our brief: [Teacher-Recruitment-Retention-Legislative-Brief-March-2023\\_new-logo.pdf](#).

HB 7168 is an important step toward ending the teacher shortage. In addition, we are testifying today in support of SB 1459, which would raise teachers' salaries across the board similar to what was done successfully in 1986. We commend the committee for proposing these bold steps, which together would send a message to young adults to come and teach in our schools.

## **HB 7169 AA ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO STUDY THE INCORPORATION OF CONNECTICUT'S CULTURAL RESOURCES WITH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING**

CEA supports the proposal in HB 7169 for educators to study strategies for incorporating local cultural resources into project-based learning. We ask committee members to include on the work group educators selected by CEA and AFT.

As a member-driven organization, CEA maintains standing committees and commissions of educators. Our Committee on Instruction and Professional Development consists of 15 teachers and has as its mission researching important topics, policies, and strategies affecting classroom instruction. If CEA were given the ability to select members for this work group, we would be able to tap into the collective expertise of CIPD to bring a wealth of knowledge and support to the group's work.

CEA has long advocated for the state to reduce its reliance on standardized testing as a way to measure what students know and are able to do, transitioning from a system that has become over-reliant on standardized testing to a system that determines student growth and learning

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needs through authentic assessment. Project-based learning is a proven strategy for inspiring students to learn by tapping into their interest and strengths beyond tested subjects. In fact, an innovative program co-led by a CEA member in Old Saybrook illustrates how the strategy can be integrated into a curriculum that connects students to the community and to skills beyond tested subjects.

We support HB 7169 and urge committee members to include CEA as one of the organizations with representation on the work group.