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Testimony of

**Louis Rosado Burch**  
**Connecticut Education Association**

Before the  
Education Committee

Re:

**HB 7076 AAC PROVIDING EDUCATION MANDATE RELIEF**  
**HB 7075 AAC ISLAMIC AND ARAB STUDIES**  
**HB 7077 AAC CRISIS RESPONSE DRILLS**

March 3, 2025

Honorable committee chairs, vice chairs, ranking members and distinguished rank and file members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important legislation. My name is Louis Rosado Burch and I am a legislative coordinator with the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

CEA is the state's largest association of certified public-school teachers, representing over 43,000 active and retired teachers across 158 school districts in Connecticut. CEA is dedicated to improving the lives of our teachers, the success of our students, and the overall quality of public education in our state.

**HB 7076: An Act Providing Education Mandate Relief**

CEA Supports HB 7076, which offers several amendments aimed at providing mandate relief to local and regional boards of education. I am limiting my comments today to the provisions of section 1, which allow children who have not reached the age of five by September 1st to begin school, provided the local or regional board of education adopts an early admission policy.

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The Connecticut General Assembly correctly raised the minimum age to attend Kindergarten in 2023, with the understanding that children are generally not developmentally ready to begin instruction before the age of 5. When the legislature approved this policy, it built in a waiver process to allow the families of students who would not meet this requirement by September 1<sup>st</sup> to appeal to the school superintendent for consideration.

In order for a child to be granted a waiver under the law, a written request from the parent or guardian is required, in addition to an assessment to determine whether the child is developmentally ready to begin classes. Despite this, we know that some districts have adopted an obscure process towards approving waivers whereby any parent or guardian who requests such a waiver is granted one, without the statutorily required assessment.

CEA supports the new requirement for school boards to adopt an early admission policy to provide certainty and uniformity in determining true developmental readiness. This will ensure that students have the emotional and developmental capacity needed to begin instruction, and not be arbitrarily granted waivers to the “5 years of age by September 1” deadline. This approach supports the appropriate identification of children who are prepared for the classroom experience, and allows for an environment where students can develop a passion for learning they will carry with them throughout their time in school.

### **HB 7075 AAC Islamic and Arab Studies**

CEA advocates for curricula that reinforce the ability of our schools to prepare students to engage with others and thrive as respectful, informed, and productive citizens in a diverse, interconnected world.

To that end, CEA believes that the continued development of a state model curriculum by educators, with input from parents and boards of education, would help ensure that the history and cultures of all of Connecticut’s citizens are represented appropriately.

Including Islamic and Arab studies in the state model curriculum, as provided for in CGS 10-25b would be a cost-effective way to promote more inclusive and responsive curricula in every district in the state.

### **HB 7077: AAC Crisis Response Drills**

CEA supports HB 7077, which requires a study of the potential adverse impacts related to the use of crisis response drills and creates a process for school districts to evaluate and revise their own crisis response procedures. Specifically, the bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to work with the Connecticut Center for School Safety and Crisis Prevention (the Center) to develop:

1. A standard definition of “crisis response drill”
2. A set of standardized terminology
3. A process to carry out, evaluate, and review procedures
4. Guidance regarding standardized responses to a variety of crisis scenarios.
5. An evaluation template schools may use to assess the efficacy of such drills and adjust their protocols
6. An independent study of the potential impacts of crisis response drills on the school community.

Periodic crisis response drills may be necessary to ensure crisis preparedness among students and school faculty, but there is evidence that the overuse of school lockdown drills can have adverse impacts on the mental health of students and staff alike. These can include an increased incidence of trauma and anxiety among some individuals, which can undermine the efficacy of such training and result in a loss of instructional time.<sup>1</sup>

While traditional fire drills have been a common practice among school districts for decades, school building lockdown drills have only recently become a routine training procedure. During such drills, students are often required to go through a series of realistic training scenarios, including active shooter situations that call for shelter-in-place techniques, which could be stress- and even trauma-inducing. *Currently, Connecticut State law requires that schools conduct at least one such crisis response drill every three months.*

The increased frequency and intensity of school lockdown drills can create a chaotic and often anxiety-producing environment, especially for individuals with post-traumatic stress issues and developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, we don’t have an abundance of longitudinal research looking at the potential adverse health and emotional impacts of crisis response drills on students and faculty. HB 7077 creates a framework to standardize procedures related to the implementation of such drills, as well as a process by which schools can evaluate and adjust their current practice to be more trauma-informed and responsive. Finally, it requires DESPP and the Center to conduct an independent study of the kinds of impacts these drills are having on the school community.

Proper planning and stakeholder engagement is necessary for effective crisis response intervention. This includes working in coordination with school faculty, local law enforcement, and parents and guardians to develop a training program that’s tailored and appropriate for a given school community. In addition to logistical and security concerns, effective crisis response planning must take into consideration students’ ages, developmental levels, the presence of physical and intellectual disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder, and languages spoken in the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/mitigating-psychological-effects-of-lockdowns>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

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Finally, as in all school matters, meaningful engagement with experienced educators is critical for the successful implementation of crisis response training and implementation. While the Working Group established under 23-31 provided for robust involvement from the public safety community, it was conducted with very limited involvement of actual certified classroom teachers. Balance is critical in developing effective education and public safety policy. CEA supports this committee's efforts to address concerns related to the efficacy and impact of school crisis response drills on our students and recommends a more clearly defined role for educators, including meaningful opportunities for teacher voice throughout that process.