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*Testimony of*

**Brett Pickerign  
Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*  
**Labor and Public Employees Committee**

Re:

**SB 1371 AA ESTABLISHING A JUST CAUSE STANDARD FOR TEACHER CONTRACT  
TERMINATIONS AND MAKING THE DECISION OF A NEUTRAL HEARING OFFICER IN  
TEACHER CONTRACT TERMINATION HEARINGS BINDING ON THE PARTIES.**

February 27, 2025

Thank you, members of the Committee, for this opportunity to speak in support of SB 1371.

My name is Brett Pickerign. I am a UniServ Representative for the Connecticut Education Association. I have worked for CEA for the last 11 years and prior to that I served in the same capacity with WEAC the CEA equivalent in Wisconsin. I also served as a staff counsel with the Wisconsin Association of School Boards where I negotiated on the management side. In these roles I have 25 years of experience in negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

SB 1371, specifically the proposed changes in the state's teacher termination statute CGS 10-151, will at last provide teachers with parity with other school and public employees with regard to job security. The two crucial elements in 10-151 that have been lacking are binding decision making by a neutral party and the requirement to apply the just cause standard.

I use the expression of providing parity in job security for a reason. Even a cursory survey of contracts and labor agreements around the state shows a near unanimity of a just cause standard before a binding neutral hearing. These standards are ubiquitous in other states

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as well. These are not radical changes but simple corrections to bring the protection of teachers' job security in line with other public employees such as police, roadworkers, public health nurses, custodians, administrative staff, and numerous others.

I have seen firsthand the failures of the current form of 10-151. In my 12 years at CEA, I have never had a teacher go to a board hearing to contest a recommendation to terminate. Instead, in nearly every instance, the teacher resigns with a separation agreement. This is not because of overwhelming evidence against the teacher. On the contrary, in several instances the teacher had strong arguments against termination. However, the prospect of enduring a difficult hearing before a neutral hearing officer only to achieve a victory that can be quickly reversed by the board after minimal review is a strong incentive to just go quietly. In just the last three years, representing eight school districts, I have put together resignation agreements for 18 educators. Would any of these teachers have saved their job if they had the opportunity to state their case before a neutral third party using a just cause standard? Could we have kept good teachers in the classroom? We will never know, but I do know several of them would have made different choices regarding resignation if the system was fair.

In the current political climate, these protections are even more critical. I am constantly hearing concerns from teachers regarding the difficulties of teaching controversial subjects. I am also hearing concerns from teachers regarding positions that were formerly uncontroversial but have become so after just one school board election. A neutral arbitrator applying a just cause standard is the strongest protection for teachers fearing political retribution by groups organized around certain political agendas. The concept of tenure was originally designed to protect teachers from this type of political fickleness. It is time Connecticut teachers have this level of protection so they can focus on teaching and doing what is best for their students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.