



**Connecticut Education Association**

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*Testimony of*

**Kate Dias  
Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the  
Education Committee*

*Re:*

***HB 6866 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR EDUCATION***

***HB 6867 AN ACT CREATING THE UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL ENDOWMENT***

***HB 6923 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SMART DEVICES IN SCHOOLS***

February 19, 2025

Good afternoon, Representative Leeper, Senator McCrory, Representative Zupkus, Senator Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee.

My name is Kate Dias, and I serve as President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), the state's largest association of certified public school teachers, representing over 40,000 active, retired, and aspiring educators across the state. 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 6866 – AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Education**

CEA supports much of this bill's intent and its focus on addressing student needs. However, we have concerns regarding specific sections and urge careful consideration of their impact.

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**Section 6 & 8** – Ensuring that districts have the resources necessary to tackle chronic absenteeism, student disengagement, and academic recovery is critical to the success of our students. Addressing such issues is vital to the success of our students. The consequences of student disconnection—on growth, development, well-being, life opportunities, and long-term success—are significant and lasting.

**Section 6** specifically requires ECS funding increases to be allocated toward addressing chronic absenteeism, student disengagement, and academic recovery. While we support the mission, redirecting anticipated ECS funds from already planned uses will result in insufficient funding for other critical needs. As educator shortages persist, special education services become more strained, and students present greater social and emotional needs, districts need a greater financial commitment from the state. Reallocating ECS funds is not sufficient.

**Section 8** extends \$10 million for the new LEAP program. CEA supports this intensive home-visitation program as an example of how new state funds can be targeted to reduce chronic absenteeism and promote student engagement in public schools.

Legislators this session have identified the most critical needs of children. These include addressing disconnected youth, expanding pre-school, attracting and retaining educators, and providing sufficient special education services (as noted in our testimony on HB 1244).

To do so, more comprehensive funding streams are needed. Funds should be allocated to specifically address disconnected youth, as the Governor’s LEAP proposal does. The state should commit to funding universal preschool, a long-standing priority of CEA, as outlined in the Governor’s proposal for Universal Preschool in HB 6867 (see below). Similarly, funds should also be specifically allocated to attract and retain educators, as CEA has proposed for the past three years.

Addressing these challenges requires commitment from the state, as well as coordinated efforts by school faculty, parents, boards of education, and local agencies. We stress the need for new funds to be allocated to districts for clearly defined purposes, including teacher salaries, to ensure that state funds are being used effectively to advance education.

**Sections 14 & 15** - CEA supports continued investment in programs such as dual credit courses (Section 14) and the Competitive Student Support grant (Section 15). Many districts rely on these initiatives to level the playing field and expand opportunities for students. Ensuring these programs receive adequate funding is essential for fostering equity and student success.

**Section 18** - CEA strongly opposes the proposal to reduce the state’s contribution to the Teachers’ Retirement Board health benefit plans from one-third to one-quarter for the next

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two years. Reducing the state's statutorily required share would ultimately shift future costs to retirees who are already experiencing significant increases in their health premiums. It could also result in more costs being shifted to active teachers. Our opposition is further detailed in testimony on HB 6866 offered by CEA Vice President Joslyn DeLancey.

**HB 6867 – AA Creating the Universal Preschool Endowment**

CEA fully supports the establishment of the Universal Preschool Endowment and believes this initiative is long overdue in Connecticut. Expanding access to universal preschool is a vital step toward ensuring that children enter kindergarten at age five with the developmental foundation they need to succeed. Investing in early childhood education is one of the most effective ways to promote long-term academic achievement, close opportunity gaps, and strengthen our state's public education system.

We commend the Governor and the Education Committee for their commitment to this essential initiative.

**HB 6923 – AA Concerning the Use of Smart Devices in Schools**

CEA supports ongoing efforts to minimize classroom distractions and ensure that our schools remain focused on learning and educational development. Teachers are increasingly forced to compete with cell phones for students' attention, and the negative effects of social media on student mental health are well documented.

We look forward to working with local districts to develop strong, clear, and enforceable policies that balance the needs of educators, students, and parents while fostering a productive learning environment.

CEA appreciates the opportunity to provide input on these important issues and thanks the Education Committee for its leadership in shaping policies that will strengthen Connecticut's public education system. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve, and that our educators receive the resources, respect, and support they need to succeed. Thank you.