



Connecticut Education Association

Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street, Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 | cea.org

Governance

Kate Dias, President
Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President
Tara Flaherty, Secretary
Stephanie Wanzer, Treasurer

Executive Director

Todd Jaeck

Testimony of

Kate Dias

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Labor 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

Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Representative Weir, Senator Sampson, and esteemed members of the Labor Committee, my name is Kate Dias, and I am president of the Connecticut Education Association, representing more than 40,000 active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across the state.

CEA supports SB 1371.

Increasingly, decisions to terminate a teacher are driven by politics, not justice. The result is good teachers leaving the classroom and new and aspiring educators seeking different career paths. SB 1371 would take politics out of discipline and reduce the intensifying climate of political fear in schools.

Unlike other board of education employees, the termination process for certified educators is governed by state law (CGS 10-151), and not by collective bargaining. As a result, for any board of education employee who is not a teacher, discipline is meted out according to a recognized legal standard of "Just Cause." This standard ensures that the process is fair, any resulting discipline is proportionate, and that appropriate consideration

is given to any past incidents. Additionally, an appeal process that includes a binding decision of a neutral arbitrator further ensures that any discipline is fair and consistent.

In short, the disciplinary process for non-certified board of education employees provides justice. For certified educators, politics trumps justice.

Under CGS 10-151, certified educators can be terminated for enumerated reasons. Among these reasons includes termination for “due and sufficient cause,” which is a broadly applied catch-all term with no legal basis. A decision by a board of education to terminate a certified educator can be appealed to an arbitrator, but the arbitrator’s determination is, by statute, not binding on the employer (please see the attached CEA legal memo for more on this). In the end, the local board of education, which is a political body, serves as judge, jury, and executioner.

This plays out in many ways that result in a climate of fear permeating educators’ workplaces. For example, an incident that the employer merely claims has caused a “distraction” can serve, and has served, as a basis for “due and sufficient cause” to terminate an educator – often when a simple reprimand or no discipline would have otherwise been justified. Recognizing that it is easier to terminate rather than discipline a teacher, educators often just resign and leave the profession.

Recently, this unfair system has gotten even worse. There is a growing number of teachers who have faced termination when their exercise of free speech online became ignited by social media. Their employer claimed that the incident in social media caused a “distraction.” As a result, and because of the unfair and politicized process, these teachers end up resigning and even leaving the profession.

To the degree that any teacher should have faced discipline for any action, such discipline should be considered using the legal standard of “Just Cause.” Any discipline, if warranted, should be appropriate and proportionate. Any resulting appeal should be adjudicated by a neutral arbitrator, whose decisions are binding. This process works for other board employees, police, firefighters, and other public employees. It should apply to educators, too. Everyone should play by the same rules.

Passage of SB 1371 would ensure that a fair and recognized termination process is in place for certified educators. It would ensure that discipline in lieu of termination is appropriate and proportionate. It would help improve school climate for teaching and learning and make schools a more desirable place to attract aspiring educators and retain experienced teachers.

Thank you.