



Connecticut Education Association

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Testimony of
Stephanie Wanzer, Tara Flaherty, and Orlando Rodriguez
Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Education Committee
Re:

SB 1244 An Act Making Investments in In-District Special Education

February 19, 2025

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee. On behalf of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), we submit this testimony from Stephanie Wanzer, Member of the Special Education Task Force and CEA Treasurer, Tara Flaherty, Parent Member of the Special Education Task Force and CEA Secretary, and Orlando Rodriguez, Research and Policy Development Specialist for CEA. CEA represents nearly 40,000 active educators in over 150 school districts across the state.

CEA supports SB 1244 An Act Making Investments in In-District Special Education, with the exception of Section 4. We highly recommend that there be a maximum fixed price schedule for private sector special education services. In Massachusetts, the state's Operational Services Division sets tuition pricing for "*... more than 200 approved special education programs in approximately 100 private schools.*"¹

However, Section 4 creates a new grant to incentivize districts to replace Approved Private Special Education Programs (APSEPs) with a new local or regional Board of Education programming. It is not necessary for boards of education to create new in-district programs for special education since Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) are already tasked to focus on these services. The proposed grant could instead target RESCs to expand their services to more local or regional boards of education. Please also

consider that there is a shortage of special education teachers and creating new in-district programs will worsen the shortage.

From the school year ending in 2019 to 2023, tuition for private, residential, or out of state placements in Connecticut increased from \$92,752 per pupil to \$112,793 per pupil.² That is an increase of nearly 22 percent in just four years. While costs have increased, the number of outplaced students during that time decreased from 3,654 to 3,399. It is important to note that the increase in expenditures is not because there are more students being outplaced, it is because more is being charged for outplaced students.

In 2021, the Connecticut Post reported that the highest salary for a school superintendent, in Connecticut, was \$315,000.³ A CEA review of IRS filings of APSEPs found exorbitant compensation over \$400,000 annually for executives of seven providers. The highest individual compensation in 2021 was \$1.4 million.⁴ Average teacher salary, in Connecticut, is \$83,400 — including the specialized teachers educating students with disabilities.⁵ You can hire an additional 17 special education teachers for the price of one APESP executive paid \$1.4 million.

Sadly, the bad practices of some providers call for tightened oversight of APSEPs. We believe a fixed-price schedule is needed to rein in runaway pricing for special education services charged by some private providers. Furthermore, there must be a cap on executive compensation. Most private sector providers are non-profit charitable organizations and should not have for-profit executive pay. It may surprise you that at least one APSEP is a for-profit foreign stock corporation.

The annual reporting proposed in this bill should also include,

1. disclosure of total compensation for the three highest paid individuals in an APSEP;
2. whether the APSEP is a non-profit or for-profit; and
3. who owns the APSEP.

We look forward to working with the State Department of Education on developing a methodology to determine a fair maximum fixed-price schedule and thank the committee for addressing this challenging topic.