

Testimony in Support of SB 1082
March 25, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker; Vice-Chairs Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, and Representative Nolan; and Ranking Members Senator Minor and Representative France; and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Walt Ciplinski. I am a retired Connecticut teacher. After teaching in Cromwell and Newington for over four decades, I remain active with several retired teacher organizations. Today, I speak on behalf of the Retired Teachers' Healthcare Advocates. We support SB 1082: AN ACT CONCERNING A RETIRED TEACHER ADVISORY COUNCIL, THE MEMBERSHIP OF AND TERM LIMITS FOR THE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT BOARD, A CAP ON CERTAIN PROFESSIONAL FEES PAID BY THE BOARD, AND MEDICARE SUPPLEMENTAL PLANS FOR RETIRED TEACHERS.

We support each provision of SB 1082 as necessary to restore the partnership between the Teachers' Retirement Board (TRB) and the retired teachers of Connecticut. I choose to focus on only one point today. An Advisory Council is needed to repair communications and allow for a formal pathway for retired teachers to share their real world experiences about living with the decisions that TRB makes. In recent years a breakdown has occurred.

Although aware years earlier, TRB did not inform retired teachers until a near bankruptcy of the Health Fund happened in 2018. At that point in time, TRB hurried about 28,000 retired teachers into a healthcare insurance decision following a confusing Open Enrollment period.

When a group of dozens of retired teachers attended a scheduled TRB meeting to speak about healthcare insurance, the TRB hastily called for an executive session after the regular meeting began and the retired teachers present were asked to leave the regular scheduled meeting. Upon resuming the regular meeting, TRB announced that starting immediately all allowed public comments would be limited to two minutes – comments only; no questions.

Since the start of 2019, about half of the regularly scheduled TRB meetings have been cancelled including virtual meetings. This further limited retired teachers' opportunity to speak in a timely manner.

Just this month, a provision in our healthcare insurance Group Certificate of Contract was altered with TRB approval to help the insurance company win a complaint filed by retired teachers with the State Insurance Commission. No advance notice was provided to retired teachers of this change to their healthcare insurance plan.

We need a statutory Advisory Council to repair communications and allow for retired teacher healthcare input before final TRB decisions. Input means before negotiations, contracts, and evaluations which are TRB's obligations. Virtual meetings are not expensive. TRB staff time should be minimal and could benefit from retired teacher volunteer time previously rebuffed by TRB. Let's fix what's broken. Working together will benefit both retired teachers and TRB. I urge the Committee to vote "Yes" and support SB 1082. Finally, I want to thank the Committee for all your efforts on behalf of Connecticut's retired teachers.

Sincerely,

Walt Ciplinski, Newington

