

Testimony in Support of SB 1082  
March 25, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Rep. Walker, Vice-Chairs Senator Hartley, Rep. Dathan and Rep. Nolan, and Ranking Members Senator Miner and Rep. France, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jane Wilson and I am a retired teacher living in Avon. I retired in 2010 after teaching in Plainville for thirty-eight years. I am a member of The Association of Retired Teachers of CT, Connecticut Education Association-Retired, Alliance of Retired Americans and The Retired Teacher Healthcare Advocates.

I am writing in SUPPORT OF 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.

I support SB 1082 and all the proposals that are part of it. However, the foundation of my testimony today is to preserve the Medicare Supplement plan as a choice for retired teachers.

The year before I retired in 2010, I attended a retirement workshop sponsored by the CEA. I clearly remember the presentation on the TRB Healthcare plan, and the presenter's words that day, when she explained that our healthcare would be a self-insured Medicare Supplement plan administered by Stirling Benefits...she went on to say it was "well named" because it was, in fact, a "sterling plan".

When I became 65, I enrolled in the TRB plan and was very happy with its full and comprehensive coverage within the Original Medicare system.

In the spring of 2018, things began to change. With short notification (four weeks), TRB transferred all enrollees to an Advantage plan, with the provision that we would have to "opt out" in order to stay on the Medicare Supplement plan. The Supplement plan would still be offered but at a much higher premium cost. I wanted to stay on my Medicare Supplement plan and I read the letter a few times to make sure that I would not be giving up my healthcare with the TRB.

Surprisingly, I would indeed have to "opt out" to stay enrolled in the Original Medicare plan that I was on. Needless to say, this was a confusing method for me to negotiate and I suspect even more confusing for older retired teachers. Many of the retired did nothing for fear that they would be "opting out" of their insurance altogether, even though they may have wanted to stay with their Supplement plan. Because of this enrollment method, many were enrolled in the Advantage plan not by choice, but by default. To this day, some are still confused as to what plan they are on. I believe this was manipulative and by design.

For the past four years I have become a student of healthcare. I have learned a great deal about Medicare and the differences between Medicare Supplement and Advantage plans. I've learned about how they work, how they are funded and the advantages and disadvantages of each. I've learned that Medicare is the great equalizer in providing health coverage for seniors and since 1965, it has protected many families from financial ruin when dealing with serious illness.

Presently, there are two plans offered through the Teachers' Retirement Board, an Advantage plan and a Medicare Supplement plan. And before I continue, I need to make it clear that maintaining a Supplement option for retired teachers does not cost the state any more money, as the state's contribution is determined by the cost of the cheaper Advantage plan. The Supplement plan enrollees pay **all** of the Supplement's difference in cost.

I appreciate the fact that TRB introduced a lower cost Advantage Plan as a more affordable option for those retired teachers, who have limited resources. But, I also believe having a choice of plans brings balance and makes both plans better through competition between the two plans. Competition is a regulator for pricing and benefits. Think about your Cable bill. The plans started out cheap and comprehensive and now they have become expensive and restrictive and that's because there are no competitive alternatives available in your area. While that kind of marketing scheme may work well enough for entertainment, think about what kind of devastating affect it would have when applied to the healthcare system.

Insurance companies promote the Advantage plan because it is more profitable for them and they would favor it being the only option offered.

Medicare Supplement plans retain the full protections of Original Medicare and that is why nearly 6,000 retired teachers believe the Supplement plan is what best serves their needs.

There appears to be a negative bias towards those who prefer Original Medicare with a Supplement and comments that have made by the TRB regarding the Supplement plan over the past few years have raised my concerns that the option of a Supplement plan will be eliminated in the future unless protected by legislation. If lost, it would be difficult to get back.

All the other reforms in this bill would actually work in collaboration with the TRB, improving communication, balancing representation of retired teachers, enhancing service to their membership and helping protect the Health Insurance Premium Account through fiscal responsibility.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote "yes" to support SB 1082 for all Connecticut teachers in their retirement.

I would like to thank the committee for all your hard work on behalf of Ct retired teachers.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jane Wilson  
Avon, CT