

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5348

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS.

Vote Date: 3/20/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/6/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

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Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.
Rep. Henry J. Genga, 10th Dist.
Rep. Jason Doucette, 13th Dist.
Sen. MD Rahman, 4th Dist.
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Rep. Juan R. Candelaria, 95th Dist.
Rep. Jaime S. Foster, 57th Dist.
Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.
Rep. Christopher Poulos, 81st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill addresses many concerns brought forth to the Education Committee from paraeducators across Connecticut. Its provisions include, but are not limited to: specifying the duties and qualifications of paraeducators, changing references to the position from 'paraprofessional' to 'paraeducator', requiring the Department of Economic and Community Development to distribute ARPA funds allocated to the department for paraeducator professional development, establishing a minimum salary for paraeducators, and requiring the Office of Policy and Management to pay the difference between the current and required minimum salary for paraeducators.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill adds a new section that would require school boards of education to pay the full employee contribution for Connecticut's Municipal Employees Retirement System (CMERS) and require the Comptroller to pay at least 50% of the contribution.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[CT State Department of Education, Commissioner, Charlene Russell-Tucker;](#) provides comment on multiple sections of this bill. They state that Sec. 1 must be clarified to ensure that paraeducators providing translation services to students are appropriately credentialed. Regarding Sec. 2 - 11, they suggest some confirming changes. Regarding Sec. 12, they express caution in adding additional mandated training requirements for teachers before the release of the report from CAFE and its working group regarding mandate relief. They express support for the provision dealing with paraeducator professional development in Sec. 25. Regarding Sec. 26, they suggest awaiting comment from the Comptroller's Office, as they will be better positioned to comment on the language as drafted. Regarding Sec. 27, they express concern with mandating a minimum starting salary for paraeducators regardless of a particular district's ability to pay. They also state that this section may be in violation of the Contracts Clause of the US Constitution, as it constitutes direct government intervention in the collective bargaining process between local and regional school board and their unions. Finally, regarding Sec. 28, they express concern as this section does not have a funding source attached to it, and thus may be an unfunded mandate.

[State of Connecticut, Comptroller, Sean Scanlon;](#) expresses strong support for this bill, stating that it builds off of their office's work in the previous session relating to a subsidy program for paraeducators on high deductible health plans. They state that this bill takes the previous work one step further by establishing a premium subsidy program for paraeducators on copay plans, expanding assistance to potentially thousands more paraeducators.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[The following members of SEIU Local 2001 express support for this bill;](#)

They state that paraeducators play vital roles within the classroom yet are among the lowest paid staffers within a school, who don't get paid during the summer and are ineligible to collect unemployment benefits. They state that this bill will give dignity to paraeducators and pay them a living wage.

[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Margaret Brady;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Julie Cinnamon;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Jennifer Corbeil;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Jennifer Duran;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Sidney Gerken;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Loretta Lechner;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Tammie Lockwood;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Sarah Majidy;](#)
[SEIU, Local 2001, Paraeducator, Rosemarie McGrath;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Jennifer McLarney;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Kelly McQueeney;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Louise Molteni;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Madeline Perry;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Jennifer Petillo;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Tammy Raiano;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Timothy Randall;](#)

[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Deanna Rodosky;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Valerie Romanello;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Maureen Thurz;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, Paraeducator, Erika Webb;](#)
[SEIU Local 2001, President, Travis Woodward;](#)

The following members of AFSCME Council 4 express support for this bill:

They state that paraeducators are on the front line of student learning and provide valuable services to support students and their unique needs. They state that many paraeducators must work a second job to make ends meet and doing so can lead to a reduction in the quality of their provided services. Additionally, they state that paraeducators cannot collect unemployment during the summer, even though they are unpaid. They state that raising paraeducator wages will greatly improve their quality of service and quality of life.

[AFSCME Council 4, Executive Director, Jody Barr;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Alice Cohen;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Shannon Cruz;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Sheryl Elliott;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Shawnte Floyd;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Diane Guz;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, President, Stacie Harris-Byrdson;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Linda Laudone;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Vanessa Logan;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Denise Roman;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Madison Rosko;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Barbara Sanford;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Wendy Telesca;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Claudine Wilkins-Chambers;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Hyclis Williams;](#)
[AFSCME Council 4, Paraeducator, Mary Wolstencroft;](#)

[Connecticut AFL-CIO, Executive Vice President, Shellye Davis;](#) expresses strong support for this bill. They state that the salary increase in this legislation will help districts to retain and recruit more paraeducators. They state that setting a wage floor is a recognition of the value of the work of paraeducators. They also express support for the provisions of this bill which will improve access to affordable healthcare for paraeducators. Finally, they suggest including a provision which would allow paraeducator bargaining units to join the CMERS.

[Connecticut Education Association, Vice President, Joslyn DeLancey;](#) expresses support for this bill, stating that it is a good next step towards improving the recruitment, retention and recognition of paraeducators. They state that the salary floor included in this bill would aid in filling vacancies and providing sufficient support staff in classrooms.

[SEEK, President, John M. Flanders;](#) supports this bill, and offers suggestions for its improvement. They state that in order to have the best people in paraeducator roles, adequate compensation must be ensured. They state that the increased salary floor within this bill will attract and retain highly qualified and motivated individuals. They suggest that this bill should address the role of paraeducators on planning and placement teams (PPT). They

state that they believe paraeducators should be mandated members of PPTs, as today they are only optional members.

[CONNCan, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez;](#) expresses support for this bill, stating that this bill is the first step in changing the narrative on what being a paraeducator means, and begins to match this role with the impact paraeducators have on the success of Connecticut children.

[CT Voices for Children, Research & Policy Fellow, Carla Abdo-Katsipus;](#) supports this bill, stating that its provisions will encourage more qualified individuals to enter the field.

[CABE, Executive Director, Patrice McCarthy;](#) supports the general goal of this bill, but also expresses concern with specific provisions within it. Regarding Sec. 1, they state opposition of efforts to impose additional state requirements for the hiring of paraeducators, as it is already increasingly difficult to find qualified individuals. Regarding Sec. 12, they state that the additional in-service training requirement included in this section contradicts the ongoing work of the Education Mandates Working Group. Finally, they express opposition to the proposed salary floor in Sec. 27, as working hours and tasks vary greatly between paraeducators in different districts.

[Private Citizen, Carol Pratt;](#) supports this bill, stating that paraeducators work incredibly hard yet get disregarded by the education system.

[New Haven Public Schools, Teacher, Maria-Threese Serana;](#) expresses strong support for this bill, stating that the current wage system for paraeducators does not reflect their qualifications and is rather a serious case of social and racial injustice.

[CT Conference of Municipalities, Advocacy Manager, Lindsay Seti;](#) supports this bill in general, but expresses concerns with certain sections. Regarding Sec. 27, they state that it should be at the district level where salaries are determined, as each district has differing needs and operational concerns.

[SEIU CT State Council, Director of Special Projects, Stacey Zimmerman;](#) expresses strong support for this bill, stating that it is an important step in improving the work life and career opportunities of paraeducators in Connecticut. They also suggest including additional language which would allow paraeducator collective bargaining units to join the CMERS.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Hebron Public Schools, Superintendent, Thomas Baird;](#) opposes this bill, citing concerns with Sec. 27 which establishes a minimum salary for paraeducators. They state that paraeducators are hourly employees rather than salaried, and legislating a minimum salary has the potential to create conflict with local collective bargaining agreements for paraeducators. They suggest amending this language to reflect a minimum hourly rate of pay rather than a salary floor.

[Bethel Public Schools, Superintendent, Christine Carver;](#) expresses strong opposition to this bill, stating that the provision to raise paraeducator salaries is an unfunded mandate, and if adopted would cost the town approximately \$2 million which it does not have budgeted.

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, Director of Government Affairs, Sherri Dinello; expresses opposition to Sec. 27 of this bill. They state that a salary floor of \$45,000 for paraeducators would create conflict with teacher salaries, which in some districts are less than \$50,000. They state that this salary floor for paraeducators would likely force an increase in teacher salaries, as certified teachers hold credentials which paraeducators lack. They state that this would cause a ripple effect of total budgeted salary costs for all employees in a school district.

CT Council of Small Towns, Executive Director, Betsy Gara; opposes this bill. Firstly, they state opposition to the provision mandating that paraeducators be included in an exclusive bargaining unit, as this approach ignores differences in the number of employed paraeducators in some districts, as well as differences in the scope of their responsibilities. Secondly, they express opposition to the salary floor within this bill, as they state that this fails to account for differences in responsibilities and working hours. Finally, they oppose the section which would direct OPM to provide subsidies to boards of education to enhance paraeducator salaries. They state that such funding may not be authorized in future years, leaving districts and taxpayers responsible for additional salary costs.

CAPSEF, Legislative Committee; expresses opposition to Sec. 27 of this bill, stating that it falls outside the purview of state legislation. They state that paraeducator wages are subject to local collective bargaining agreements.

New Milford Public Schools, Superintendent, Janey Parlato; expresses concern with multiple provisions within this bill. Firstly, regarding Sec. 12, they state that training paraeducators on a wide-ranging list of topics will dilute the effectiveness and purpose of the training needs of paraeducators. Regarding Sec. 27, they state that establishing a salary floor diminishes the importance of collective bargaining for paraeducators.

EastCONN, Executive Director, Eric Protulis; expresses concern with Sec. 2, 27, and 28 of this bill. Regarding Sec. 2, they state that this bill lacks information on how these proposed services would be paid for. They state that this is an unfunded mandate and would place undue burden on local school districts who already have tight budgets. Regarding Sec. 27 and 28, they state that the salary floor included in the bill could strain the already limited resources of many school districts and may conflict with ongoing contract negotiations among paraeducators.

Reported by: Benjamin Lee

Date: 4/9/24