

# Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-377

AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT BOARD'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES TO THE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT

**Title:** SYSTEM STATUTES.

**Vote Date:** 4/4/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/15/2024

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Appropriations Committee, at the request of the Teachers' Retirement Board

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

The bill makes several technical changes to statutes effecting the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS). In addition, the bill seeks two additional changes: 1) to sunset participation in TRS by employees of the Children's Center of Hamden on 7/1/2024, as employees of the Center do not meet IRS regulations for eligibility in the retirement system; and 2) to align the processes for elections to the Teachers' Retirement Board in order to reduce costs and administrative burdens.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

[Helen Sullivan, Administrator, CT Teachers' Retirement Board \(TRB\)](#) – Ms. Sullivan summarized the proposed changes, stating that the bill "establishes qualified entities, benefit commencement, eligibility for account settlements, and aligns the administrative process for board elections".

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Kate Dias, President of the Connecticut Education Association \(CEA\) and Joslyn DeLancey, CEA Vice President](#) – Ms. Dias and Ms. DeLancey submitted testimony in support of Section 5 of the bill, which seeks to align the date of the elections of all Teachers' Retirement Board members to July. They cited the reduction in costs, administrative burdens, and potential confusion associated with running two elections within a matter of months. In addition, they

expressed concern on behalf of CEA retired members regarding a provision that passed during the 2023 legislative session that "broke" with statute by making two of the four elected retirees voted upon by retirees only. They asked that the statute be revised to align the election of the new retiree members to the existing election process.

[Robyn Kaplan-Cho, Retirement Specialist, CT Education Association \(CEA\)](#) – In addition to speaking in support of the election changes suggested by Ms. Dias and Ms. DeLancey, Ms. Kaplan-Cho requested that the Appropriations Committee consider adding language that would allow active teachers receiving the TRB's long-term disability benefit receive a double subsidy (\$440 per month), similar to what retirees who never qualify for Medicare receive. She explained that the double subsidy would allow disabled teachers to better afford their insurance as they grapple with severe physical and financial distress. In some cases, the disability benefit disabled teachers are receiving either does not cover their insurance costs each month, or the costs will use up most of the benefit.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Rep. Josh Elliott](#) – Rep. Elliot submitted testimony expressing his opposition to the sunset provisions that would affect employees of the Children's Center of Hamden who are hired after July 1, 2024. He wrote that not allowing future employees of the Children's Center to participate in TRS will affect the agency's ability to recruit and retain certified educators to work with impoverished and at-risk youth.

[Tom Laudadio, Vice President of Education, The Children's Center of Hamden](#) – On behalf of the Children's Center, Mr. Laudadio expressed his strong opposition to the sunset provisions proposed by the TRB. He explained that the Center's certified educational staff have participated in TRS for over 50 years, with twelve of their current staff actively participating in the system. He stated that the ability of their school staff to take advantage of the pension benefit has been crucial in the Center's efforts to attract and retain qualified employees. Mr. Laudadio spoke of The Children's Center's ability to successfully educate extremely challenging students due to their competent team of staff. He further explained that as a nonprofit school, the salary structure at the Center falls short when compared to public schools' salaries. Mr. Laudadio argued that the ability of the Center's educators to participate in the Teacher Retirement System has allowed their teachers to maintain a career in the school and invest in its mission to "provide care and education to some of Connecticut's most vulnerable and traumatized children and adolescents".

[Colleen Ezzo, Labor Relations Representative, United Professional & Service Employees Union \(UPSEU\), Local 1222](#) – Ms. Ezzo shared that her union represents teachers at The Children's Center of Hamden. She stated that the Center is "a critical part of the Hamden community and of this state - providing academic instruction to Connecticut's most 'at risk' youth". Ms. Ezzo wrote of the Center's struggles as a non-profit agency to compete with the teacher salary and benefit packages made available in public sector settings and the challenges faced by the Center to fill vacancies. She expressed concern that the elimination of the TRS pension for new hires would further impede and exacerbate the vacancy issue, thereby causing "a devastating impact to these students most at risk, as well as to this community and this State".

[Rhea Klein, Member, CEA-R](#) – Ms. Klein wrote that while she agrees that it is more efficient and cost effective to realign the election dates for the TRB elections, she believes that the language of the bill needs adjusting. She urged the Appropriations Committee to consider the proposed change next year when TRB can offer better defined language. As the time of the election process must be completed and certified on or before July 1, 2027 and quadrennially on that date going forward, she believes there is time to correct the proposed language during the next legislative session.

[Rita McDougald-Campbell, Retired Public School Administrator](#) – Ms. McDougald-Campbell stated that while she agrees that the elections for all active and retired representatives should be held simultaneously every four years, she strongly recommends that the election process be set to commence on April 1 beginning in 2027, not July 1 of that year. She believes that an April 1 date would allow elections to occur while active educators are still in the classroom, and retired educators who temporarily reside outside of Connecticut during the winter months have returned to Connecticut for the spring. Further, holding elections in July could have a negative effect on voter participation, as July is a prime vacation period for active and retired teachers. She offered that by beginning the election period on April 1 and having it completed on or before July 1 would also allow all newly elected active and retired representatives to be publicly identified and seated at the first TRB meeting following the completed election. Additionally, she offered that all four of the active representatives would be nominated and elected solely by active educators, and all four retired representatives would be nominated and elected by retired educators under her suggested timeframe. She stated that by following the suggested alternative schedule, the Teachers' Retirement Board would be able to meet its financial goals, to hold successful simultaneous elections for all eight active and retired TRB representatives, and to have those representatives nominated and elected by their discrete constituent groups (active teachers for active teachers and retired teachers for retired teachers) in a manner that would generate maximum elector participation.

[Mary Hendrickson, Retired Teacher](#) – Ms. Hendrickson expressed concern that the changes being requested by the TRB to the election process are "premature and hastily proposed". She stated that the short legislative session does not provide the time necessary for retired teachers to weigh in on the proposed changes. Further, she believes that the proposed date change for retired teacher elections to July is arbitrary. She spoke of the efforts by retired teachers over the years to get two more retired teachers elected to the TRB and elected by retired teachers. Ms. Hendrickson believes that the language SB 377 is open to interpretation and confusing. As the next TRB election is scheduled for 2027, she believes that there is no reason to adopt changes to the process this year.

[Sara Messier, Ph.D.](#) – Dr. Messier wrote that she is opposed to the bill due to a lack of clarity with regard to the wording in line 111, as she believes that the language is not adequately specific and is subject to misinterpretation. She stated that while she agrees that it is important to align the election dates for the seating of TRB members, the language needs to be rewritten to clearly define all the components of the election process. Dr. Messier also requested that legislators be mindful that only retired teachers nominate and elect retired teacher representatives, as outlined in PA 23-64.

[Jane Wilson, Retired Teacher](#) – Ms. Wilson expressed concern that the proposed changes to the election date could affect the "fair election of representatives to the Teachers' Retirement Board". She stated that while she supports aligning the election dates in order to reduce

costs, she feels it is important that better defined language be to more clearly define the election process, including: the public announcement for the election of open seats on the TRB, the election process, the date parameters of the election, and the date that new Board members will be seated.

Similar testimony in opposition to the proposed changes in Section 5 was submitted by the following:

[Kathy Hennessey, Retired Teacher](#)

[Walt Ciplinski, Retired Teacher](#)

[Susan Schmidek, Retired Teacher](#)

**Reported by: Susan Keane**

**Date: April 10, 2024**