

**Testimony of Shay Lewis,
Capital Region Education Council (CREC), 5th Grade Writing Teacher
Secretary of CREC-EA Union
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 22, 2018**

Good evening, Senators Osten and Formica and Representative Walker.

My name is Shay Lewis, and I am a fifth-grade teacher at CREC and the secretary of the CREC-EA board union.

I am here today to address the crisis in our public schools. Continuing budget cuts are causing havoc for our students and our public schools--specifically the elimination of funding for Connecticut's Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) program. This is one of the most highly regarded new teacher induction and support programs in the country, and without it, we are no longer able to support our new teachers effectively to help them become the best teachers they can be. As schools in the CREC system work to do a better job attracting and retaining a teaching force that reflects the diversity of the students we serve, TEAM is a critical part of achieving this goal.

I am a teacher who has worked in both Connecticut and California, and I have multiple district perspectives on what it takes to train and retain teachers in the profession. I have been in districts that did and did not provide mentoring programs and found that the districts that supported me as a new teacher were the ones where I was the most successful.

Being a product of a new teacher support program, I am fully aware of what it is like to be placed in a classroom for the first time and not feel alone. This is due to the teacher-mentoring program that provided authentic classroom learning--something that could not come from any college education class. The mentoring program offered immediate access to resources, guidance, and the tools needed to be successful through an experienced, veteran teacher. New teacher programs are a way for colleagues positively impact young teachers, providing support, relationships with veteran teachers, and advice from trained colleagues. The ability to reflect, process, and assess with an experienced colleague is what creates a professional who will stay in teaching.

TEAM provides all of this. When you are not professionally supported, nurtured, and given an opportunity to grow, the chance of remaining in this profession is low.

This is why the TEAM mentoring program is so important to the sustainability of teachers in the profession. The burden needs to be back on the state and not the districts so that we can continue to support new teachers in the five modules of classroom environment, planning, instruction, assessment, and professional responsibility and teacher leadership.

I urge you to restore funding to this critical program and take the burden of TEAM funding off the districts and put it back onto the state.