*Testimony of*

**Joslyn DeLancey**

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*

**Education Committee**

*Re:*

HB 5348 AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS

March 6, 2024

The crisis of educator shortages continues to plague our schools. Persistent shortages make learning more difficult and make working as an educator more stressful and less desirable. Ending the shortage will take increased state funding. Expectations that municipalities will increase funding or reallocate federal dollars are unrealistic and wishful thinking. An infusion of funding similar to the investment made with passage of the Education Enhancement Act of 1986 is necessary.

CEA supports HB 5348 as a good next step toward improving the recruitment, retention, and recognition of paraeducators. We believe it is one part of restoring classroom staffing, stability, and human connections for our students.

Starting salaries for paraeducators, like for teachers, are woefully below where they need to be. This bill’s proposed minimum paraeducator salary of $45,000 would go a long way toward filling vacancies and providing sufficient support staff in classrooms. So, too, is it necessary to establish a competitive minimum teacher salary and to comparably raise current teacher salaries.

Similarly, ensuring that our paraeducators have affordable health insurance would improve recruitment and retention and better ensure that students and staff in schools remain healthy. Increasing access to professional development will result in better outcomes for students and their development, and greater job satisfaction and retention for educators.

CEA supports HB 5348 as one component of a comprehensive effort to uplift the work of all educators – paraeducators, teachers, and certified student support staff. We urge the legislature and governor to act now and signal to young adults that education is a desired and respected career path to pursue. Connecticut’s school communities, today and tomorrow, need you to invest in educators to ensure that our students can thrive.

Thank you.