*Testimony of*

**Joslyn DeLancey**

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*

**Education Committee**

Re:

SB 381 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND REVISIONS TO THE MANDATED REPORTER REQUIREMENTS

HB 5437 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

March 13, 2024

Co-Chair Senator McCrory, Co-Chair Representative Currey, Ranking Member Senator Berthel, Ranking Member Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Joslyn DeLancey, and I am the vice president of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and a member of the Teachers’ Retirement Board.

I am testifying today in favor of SB 381 AAC the Teaching Profession and Revisions to the Mandated Reporter Requirements, with specific attention to COVID service recognition payments for teachers and the election process for the TRB. CEA has submitted comments on various aspects of this bill in separate testimony by CEA President Kate Dias and others.

Additionally, I am including testimony on HB 5437 AAC Mandate Relief regarding a potential additional mandate for relief consideration. CEA Teacher Development Specialist Dr. Kate Field, who served on the Mandate Relief Working Group, has also submitted testimony on this issue.

**SB 381 AAC The Teaching Profession and Revisions to the Mandated Reporter Requirements**

Section 3 – CEA supports the proposal to provide $1,000 COVID-19 service recognition payments to active and retired teachers who worked during the pandemic.

CEA thanks the Education Committee for raising a bill that finally recognizes the sacrifices made and risks taken on by teachers at the height of the pandemic. In recent years, private sector and state public employees have received state payments for the sacrifices they made during that time. We commend the members of this committee for stepping up when our local school districts have not recognized their educators for their service.

In addition to the valiant contributions of our first responders, teachers were among the first essential workers to return to work and face the risks of exposure to the earlier, more virulent strains of COVID at a time when vaccines and treatments had not yet been developed and deployed. Teachers bravely returned to schools, facing close distancing with young or special needs children who exhibited poor and inconsistent masking skills. Throughout this period, teachers contracted COVID, in some cases multiple times.

Despite these very real risks, Connecticut teachers stood as a rock in the turbulence that had disrupted students’ lives. For some students, navigating the pandemic introduced trauma; for others, it piled more adversity onto underlying traumas that had already disrupted their development. Throughout this, teachers provided stability and comfort at a great toll to their own personal well-being. This “secondary trauma” was very real and palpable, so much so that CEA responded with workshops, helplines, and pathways to mental health support for teachers across the state.

As an elementary school teacher in Darien during the pandemic, a district with more resources than most others, I witnessed these sacrifices and the extra mile teachers went to make a difference. My experience was like so many others. From March to June of the shutdown, I navigated the challenges of Zoom like thousands of other teachers. I relied on creativity to try and make a difference. I hosted a virtual Harry Potter Day that had me driving around to my students’ mailboxes (masked, of course) delivering “letters to Hogwarts.” This was followed by Harry Potter Day goodie bags so that my fifth grade students could participate in 5Ds annual Harry Potter Day and not miss a special tradition even though schools were closed. Despite the health risks, Darien schools reopened in person beginning with the 2020-2021 school year and, save a few days around the holidays (to keep everyone safe), elementary schools were fully in person all year. Many teachers fell ill but returned to school after recovery to carry on.

The COVID recognition payments proposed in this bill signal to teachers that the state recognizes these contributions. It also signals to the state, and potential aspiring educators, recognition that teaching is a profession valued by legislators and the state as whole. We urge you to advocate for the passage of this provision in the revised budget.

**Section 6** – CEA supports the proposal to fix language enacted last session adding two additional retirees as board members on the Teachers’ Retirement Board (TRB).

Last session, the legislature increased the number of retirees elected to the TRB by two. CEA supported this increase, which helps ensure that those who are most vested in the stability, solvency, and longevity of the Teachers’ Retirement System—active and retired teachers—have an equal voice in the decisions of the TRB.

As a result of last year’s passage, the TRB consists of 4 elected teacher retirees, 4 elected active teachers, and 8 seats that are chosen by the governor through appointments and ex officio membership—all of which are voting members (see table below).

However, the bill that passed last year created a costly problem by establishing the election of the two additional retirees at a different time of year from other elections for TRB members. This results in an unnecessary administrative cost to the TRB for carrying out an additional election complete with mailings and processing expenses. In fact, last year, two such elections were held as an effect of implementing the legislation.

Additionally, the enacted legislation broke with the remaining statute by making two of the four elected retirees voted upon only by retirees. This was odd and inexplicably undemocratic given that the remaining retirees and all active teachers are voted on by the entire membership (active and retired).

Section 6 resolves these problems by aligning the elections of all active and retiree members to the standard July 1 date. This would be effective in the next election cycle (2027). It also aligns the election of the new retiree members to the existing democratic process, whereby all those with a stake in the retirement system have equal votes.

CEA and CEA-Retired urge members to support Section 6.

**TRB Board Composition (4 year terms)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Members** (all have voting rights) | **Nominated By** | **Elected by** |
| State Treasurer | Ex officio | NA |
| OPM Secretary | Ex officio | NA |
| Commissioner of Education | Ex officio | NA |
| Chief Elected Municipal Officer | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1991) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Active Teacher (2011 – Union Member) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |

**5437 An Act Concerning Mandate Relief**

We commend the work that Education Committee members have undertaken in participating on the educational mandates work group administered by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE). CEA appreciates CABE’s leadership on this work and supports HB 5437 as an important initial step toward mandate relief. CEA staff member Kate Field has submitted testimony in support of this work.

As the committee members consider this bill, I want to bring to your attention a mandate that may be timely to address for numerous reasons. More than decade ago, the legislature mandated that certain elementary school teachers complete a 2+ hour Foundations of Reading Survey every two years. This “survey” is essentially an assessment that was well-intended to result in targeted professional development in the teaching of reading.

However, this mandate has outlived its value, and its intent has never been realized. Today there is continual demand among elementary school teachers for targeted professional learning in scientifically based reading instruction. As the state, under the leadership of Sen. Miller, works to improve reading instruction and end vestiges of failed whole-language instructional strategies, redirecting the time and resources devoted to the survey instead to more professional development in reading instruction would be a win for students, educators, and the state.

To implement this change, CEA suggests amending [CGS 10-145r](https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_166.htm#sec_10-145r) to provide school districts an option to conduct the survey, as they have since its inception, or devote at least equivalent time and resources toward professional learning in scientifically based reading instruction. Districts opting to provide professional learning in lieu of administering the survey would experience a net mandate reduction given that additional professional development in reading instruction would satisfy existing requirements in Connecticut’s recent Right to Read legislation.

We respectfully ask committee members to consider adding this flexibility as part of its package of mandate relief to districts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.