



Testimony of
Mary W. Russell, Paraprofessional
Hartford Federation of Paraprofessionals, AFT Local 2221

SB 972 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING

Program Review and Investigations Committee
February 27, 2015

Good afternoon members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Mary Russell and I am a paraprofessional and legislative liaison for Local 2221, representing the Hartford Federation of Paraprofessionals. It is on their behalf that I am here to testify on SB 972 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning School Paraprofessionals Staffing.

I have been a paraprofessional in the Hartford Public Schools for almost 10 years now. I have worked at some of the lowest performing schools in the City's district. I have worked as a classroom para and as a one-on-one adult support for special needs children. Some of these children have been severely limited in their ability to function within inclusive classrooms.

The reason we are all here today is that we care about educating all children of our state. It may sound trite, but in fact, it does take a village to raise a child. Without a team effort, no one initiative will ever solve our problems. I feel, and I know that a number of my colleagues feel, that paraprofessionals are sometimes overlooked. We are on the front line in working with children with behavioral and cognitive problems, but we often feel invisible. As the PRI report noted, there are no standardized job descriptions for paraprofessionals, no clear cut language to be included in IEP's concerning what is meant by adult support. We are often sent scurrying all over the building when one classroom or another suddenly needs a short term sub, or when the cafeteria needs extra supervision. And what happens to our assigned students? We are sometimes told to "just take them with us!"

The final report provided a number of excellent recommendations that would help improve the effectiveness of the paraprofessionals every day. We are therefore disappointed that SB 972 does not contain the most effective of those recommendations:

- **Recommendation #3 and #4** concern IEP's for the children we work with. When the language of the IEP is broad and vague, our role is not clear and we lose our effectiveness. Sample language in IEPs, and audits would go a long way toward making us better able to perform our jobs.
- **Recommendation #7:** This recommendation concerns us because there are a number of times that we are asked to take over classes or other supervisory duties, and we feel torn, because in those cases, we are ignoring the special needs children who we are responsible for.

In short, the absence of standard language in IEP's delineating the role of paraprofessionals is detrimental to us, to the special needs children we work with, and indirectly to all members of the school community. We urge you to include these recommendations into SB 972. Thank you.