



Testimony of

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***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 Representative Carpino, Senator Fonfara and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Shellye Davis. I have been a Paraprofessional in the Hartford schools for 25 years now. I am also the AFT Connecticut Jurisdictional Vice President for Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRP). I have the pleasure of speaking and working with paraprofessionals in many districts in and out of state. On behalf of all of these dedicated hard working Professionals and their important work, I am here to testify on SB 972 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigation Committee Concerning School Paraprofessional Staffing.

Thank you for taking a closer look at Paraprofessional staffing levels in our public schools and thank you for the opportunity today to address a few critical Issues related to understaffing.

Given the persistent and unresolved understaffing issue, combined with the practice of Paraprofessionals being pulled out of programs and away from their 1 to 1 student in order substitute or cover classes, our students are not receiving their IEP services. If a 1-1 student is absent, this practice is fine. However, if the student is present, learning and consistency within the plan are interrupted.

The second common occurrence is when a new special needs learner is registered and is then placed in a class where there is already an Adult Support Paraprofessional. In such a case, the Paraprofessional gets two students, even when an IEP requires 1 to 1 support.

Special needs students differ from one student to another student. The divergent needs of two students or sometimes three reduce educational effectiveness. Then there is the safety aspect. If one student is a runner (a student whose concentration is such that the student may wander off or run away from the Paraprofessional), that student requires the Paraprofessional's full attention. In some cases both students may be runners. How can a Paraprofessional safely tend to one student while attempting to retrieve the student who leaves? Under these conditions, there is great disruption, or worse the possibility of serious injury.

The safety concerns do not end there. The number of reported Workers' Compensation claims rise when Paraprofessionals are given more students. These costs can be significantly reduced

with proper staffing. There are no reserve substitutes for Adult Support Paraprofessionals such as there are for Teachers.

There is currently no effective monitoring done by the State Department of Education, to ensure that districts are in fact following Staffing requirements mandated in every student's IEP.

I feel that recommendations #3, 6, and 7 from the report need to be added to SB 972 in order to address the staffing problems I have highlighted.

3. The State Department of Education's focused monitoring process should include an inspection of a random sample of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to ensure that the language outlining paraprofessional services is written with enough specificity regarding the amount of time a paraprofessional is to provide support to a student and what the support entails. This will inform the consultant team, if that district is selected for phase-three assistance, on whether IEP specificity is an issue, and if so, allow the CSDE to provide technical assistance in writing IEPs. If the IEPs do indicate specifically what and how much paraprofessional assistance is to be provided, the in-district focused monitoring sessions should examine whether the IEPs are being followed.
6. The State Department of Education should develop and distribute a policy brief stating that IEPs should be drafted in such a way as to clearly identify the type of employee providing services and supports. (i.e., certified vs. non-certified) The brief should outline how to appropriately specify the frequency and duration of such services and supports. The brief should also provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate language and clearly indicate where in the IEP this information should appear.
7. The State Department of Education should conduct a random audit of a sample of districts' rosters of substitute teachers and verify that each individual listed has a bachelor's degree, or that the district has a waiver for that individual. Secondly, CSDE should assess whether the number of substitutes on the roster appears adequate to meet the needs of the district, given the size, number of schools, and composition of the student body. If the roster appears inadequate, CSDE should further examine what those districts are doing to ensure adequate classroom coverage by qualified staff when teachers are absent.

SB 972 will improve the quality of public education for each of our special need learners if recommendations 3, 6, and 7 are added to address the problems and critical concerns that we presented to the committee last year. We urge you to please add recommendations 3, 6, and 7.

Thank you for your time. Are there any questions I can answer for you?