

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

PA 14-212

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2014**

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Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry for the confusion. We're about to set up our third consent calendar for the evening, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Please proceed, sir.

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that -- I would like to move the following items to the Consent Calendar, all of which are in concurrence with the Senate.

Senate Bill 293, House Calendar Number 539 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar Number 321; Calendar 486 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 542 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 540 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 507 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 411 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 472 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 314; Calendar 132 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 116 as amended by Senate "A"; Calendar 541 as amended by Senate "A" and Senate "B".

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Aresimowicz, I believe that a couple of the bills that you called were actually Senate calendar numbers, not House calendar numbers. So I believe the Clerk knows what you're intending, he

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may -- with your indulgence, I was going to ask him
to, perhaps, offer the correction.

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Mr. Speaker, maybe for clarification, I'll go
through the bill numbers very quickly.

It being Senate Bill 29 --

REP. CAFERO (142nd):

Mr. Speaker -- excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Is this
the appropriate time for one to object to all the
items on the Consent Calendar?

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

It would be.

REP. CAFERO (142nd):

I will object to all the items on the Consent
Calendar. I would respectfully request that we talk.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, sir.

With that objection, we will suspend action on
the Consent Calendar so that the Minority and Majority
Leader may talk.

[Pause.]

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I -- just to clarify, I'm going to run through the bill number and the calendar number.

It would be Senate Bill 293, which is Calendar 545; Senate Bill 429, which is Calendar 539; Senate Bill 115, which is Calendar 321; Senate Bill 203, which is Calendar 486; Senate Bill 71, which is Calendar 542; Senate Bill 447, which is Calendar 540; Senate Bill 61, which is Calendar 507; Senate Bill 75, which is Calendar 411; Senate Bill 321, which is Calendar 472; Senate Bill 66, which is Calendar 314; Senate Bill 178, which is Calendar 495; Senate Bill 430, which is Calendar Number 489; and Senate Bill 425, which is Calendar 51 -- 541.

And I move adoption of the Consent Calendar.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Mr. Clerk, does that match your listing of the calendar numbers?

THE CLERK:

430, Mr. Majority Leader, Senate Bill 430 is calendar what?

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

489.

THE CLERK:

Yes. It does, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

And, Mr. Majority Leader, could you also indicate -- I'm sorry to have to delay this for a second, but according to my notes, all of those -- well, most of those are adopted -- or amended by Senate "A"? If you could just --

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Correct, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

specify --

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Except the first and the last, sir. The last one being Senate "A" and "B," sir.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you. As long as we're clear about the amendments that have been adopted in the Senate.

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Correct, Mr. Speaker. And I move passage of the bills on today's Consent Calendar Number 3.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The question before the Chamber is adoption of the Consent Calendar Number 3?

Staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Members take your seats. The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House is voting on Consent Calendar Number 3.

The House is voting by roll. Will members please return to the chamber immediately.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted?

Take your time, Representative Boukus.

Would members please check the board to make sure your vote is properly cast. If all the members have voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally.

Will the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Consent number -- Consent Calendar Number 3

Total Number Voting	147
Necessary for Passage	74
Those voting Yea	147
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	4

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The Consent Calendar is passed.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 506?

THE CLERK:

Calendar 506, on page 25, favorable report of the joint standing committee on Appropriations. Senate

Bill 55, AN ACT CONCERNING COMPLAINTS THAT ALLEGED MISCONDUCT BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY PERSONNEL.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (146th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move for the acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Question's on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Will you remark, sir?

REP. FOX (146th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Clerk has an amendment, LCO Number 4583. I'd ask that it be called, and I be allowed to summarize.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Will the Clerk please call LCO 4583, which has been previously designated Senate Amendment "A."

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THE CLERK:

On Page 36, Calendar 293, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 425 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER. Favorable Report of the Committee on Education and there are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Hello, Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. Nice to see you this evening.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, madam.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

I move the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage. Will you remark, madam?

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. The bill before you is a Resolution to an audit recommendation that was made by the State Auditors in terms of what the future governing body of the State Education Resource Center should look like.

The bill recommends a quasi-public agency created to act on behalf of the state and that, and the bill permits the Education Commissioner to continue to allocate funds to the new center to provide a range of services to local and regional boards of education to divest itself of its relationship with Rensselaer, which was the, is the fiduciary and it is to divest itself by June 30th of this year.

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I do have an amendment for clarification purposes. If the Clerk would kindly call 5110 and then I be allowed to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 5110, Senate "A", offered by Senators
Stillman, Boucher, et al.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. This is a clarifying Amendment, which makes it clear, obviously, that which programs the Center should continue to support and before I go any further, I think I have to move adoption of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Thank you. So this is on adoption of the Amendment. It specifically mentions as well that the Resource Center Library continue. I know that was very important to folks that because of the service that it provides. The Resource Center has about 97 employees advising and working with local and regional boards of education and I urge adoption of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Will you remark further on the Amendment? If not, I'll try your minds.

All those in favor please signify by saying aye.

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SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

Those opposed, nay. The Ayes have it. Senate "A" is adopted. Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Senator McLachlan.

SENATOR MCLACHLAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. I stand for the purpose of an amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR MCLACHLAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the Clerk should have LCO Number 5583. Would he please call the bill and allow me to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 5583, Senate "B", offered by Senators Kissel and McLachlan.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McLachlan.

SENATOR MCLACHLAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. I move the Amendment and seek leave to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

On adoption. Will you remark, sir?

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SENATOR MCLACHLAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, this bill briefly, allows an extension of the current law where retired police officers are allowed to work in public schools, in schools in Connecticut for security purposes.

This particular Amendment would allow retired federal law enforcement agents who have training equal to or greater than Police Officer Standards and Training Council certification in this state.

It also would allow a retired police officer who has, serves in a police department in another state who has, meets, or exceeds this same standard of POST in Connecticut. I seek adoption.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, sir. Will you remark on the Amendment?
Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. I rise to state this is a friendly Amendment and I urge adoption.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Will you remark further on the Amendment? Will you remark further on the Amendment?

If not, all those in favor please signify by saying aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

All those opposed, nay? The ayes have it. Senate "B" is adopted. Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

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Yes, thank you, Mr. President. That completes this bill. In order for it to be acted on in the House we'll need a Roll Call Vote. Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. We'll have a Roll Call Vote. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

An immediate Roll Call has been ordered in the Senate.
Immediate Roll Call is ordered in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Osten. Senator Hartley. Have all members voted? If all members have voted, please check the board to make sure your vote is accurately recorded.

If all members have voted, the machine will be closed and the Clerk will announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Senate Bill Number 425.

Total number voting	36
Necessary for passage	19
Those voting Yea	35
Those voting Nay	1
Those absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

The bill as amended passes. Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, if the, would move that last enacted item, Senate Bill 293, excuse me, Calendar 293, Senate Bill 425 be immediately transmitted to the House of Representatives.

THE CHAIR:

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So moved.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. If the Clerk would now call Calendar Page 2, Calendar 59, Senate Bill 71.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 2, Calendar 59, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 71 AN ACT CONCERNING ONLINE EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR BOATING AND HUNTING SAFETY, Favorable Report of the Committee on Environment. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Meyer. My cousin, uncle and brother.

SENATOR MEYER:

Thank you. Mr. President, I do move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of this good bill.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage. Will you remark?

SENATOR MEYER:

Yes, Mr. President. There is an amendment. Could the Clerk please call LCO 5590 and I be given permission to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 5590, Senate "A" offered by Senators Williams, Looney, et al.

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the comments to outside in the halls or something along that line. Everybody might not be in the same side of this issue, but please, it's up to us to listen and to take that with us for continuing legislation. So, please be courteous to the speakers out there and I thank you for the opportunity and I thank you for coming.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Representative Ackert and those last words are really well heard. Politeness to all whether you agree or disagree with them completely, is valued. With that we go to Commissioner Stefan Pryor, the State's Commissioner of Education to be followed by Allan Taylor, Chair of the State Board of Education. Welcome. The floor is yours, Commissioner.

STEFAN PRYOR: Good afternoon, Chairs, Ranking Members and honorable members of this committee. The debate about the Common Core in Connecticut should be about how best to prepare for the future by moving forward, rather than how to defend the past while moving backward. Today we should be finding new and better ways to help our Districts, schools, teachers and students, with the transition to the new standards, not prohibiting the state from providing assistance precisely when such support is needed. You've heard me speak to some statistics. I want to return to some of those stats, members of this committee.

Looking at our colleges, over 70 percent of the state's community college students require remediation at this point in time, as well as nearly 20 percent of students entering the board of regent state universities. They require remediation when they arrive at college. Those are

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'accountability' system for our state, that take into account these new assessments that are aligned with the Common Core.

To conclude, honorable members of this committee, as our young people consider their goals and aspirations for the future, they seek to meet the requirements of the colleges and the work places they'll be entering. What will we do to help them? Will we shirk our responsibility, defensively holding onto the past and refusing to embrace the future? Or instead, will we provide the supports and the flexibility that our educators need and that our youngsters need to succeed in the new Common Core era. Thank you.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Commissioner for that testimony and that helpful historical context. Are there questions from members of the committee? Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. Again, welcome Commissioner. In your testimony you have also referred to some other bills that are in front of us. If I may, one of them which is an issue that was before this committee last year, the state education resource center. I'd appreciate it if you could comment on that bill as well as the paraprofessional staffing levels.

STEFAN PRYOR: Absolutely. Thank you, Madame Chair. First on the SERC bill, the General Assembly in the last session, received a proposal from the State Department of Education and also contemplated its own proposal regarding the conversion of SERC into a quasi-public entity that would be fully compliant and require to be with a state bidding rules, FOI and other key

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elements of state statute.

We proactively presented that proposal to this committee and to the General Assembly. You incorporated some of those requirements but asked myself and my team to present the General Assembly with a report on the subject. We've since done so and we've analyzed the subject once again.

We reaffirm our position that SERC ought to become a proper quasi-public agency with all of the requirements that follow to ensure transparency, to ensure that procurement rules are followed, to ensure that we're all comfortable with its operation going forward so it can continue its good work on behalf of educators and students. So we share the view that that should be considered and if you deem appropriate, passed during this session. There is more information in my report, Madame Chair, to the General Assembly. I'd be happy to answer any further questions.

On the issue of the paraprofessional's task force, the proposal is for a task force that would look at the capacity for and the need for paraprofessionals in our system. Paraprofessionals or para-educators are essential professionals within our teams at the school level. They compliment teachers and they serve critical roles in classrooms across our state. We would welcome the creating of this task force and we think it's important. The only notation we would offer in addition, Madame Chair, is that there is a paraprofessional's council that already exists. We would request coordination with it and we would be happy to support its activity.

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SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate your input. It is briefly mentioned in your testimony, your comments about that as well as one other bill. So, am I to understand that the SERC bill, the state education resources center bill for the most part, you're supporting?

STEFAN PRYOR: We would be willing to support it verbatim, Madame Chair. There are a couple of tweaks that in my March first submitted revised report per statute, that was the cycle required submission for early March, we recommended a couple of tweaks from last year's version that are a few sentences aimed at tightening up the provisions that we share as important. But I'll say, even verbatim I think it's a vast improvement over the status quo and we would support the existing bill and we'd be happy to dialogue around those few sentences.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, sir.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Senator.
Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and good to see you again and thank you for your testimony and we've got to hear from you on it before, so I have no questions for you on those. Thank you for your report, by the way, on SERC. It was concise and I appreciate that. My question is for -- another bill you did is 5520, AN ACT CONCERNING THE AVAILABILITY OF AN ON-LINE STUDY SKILLS CURRICULUM, and you talk about being a burden -- additional overburden. That's kind of involuntary isn't it for the Districts if they -- I know that the State Department of Education would have to develop that, I believe, that processes if

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I'm not correct and then be available to Districts, but you had mentioned it being overburdened. Is it for the Districts or for your office, sir?

STEFAN PRYOR: It is for the Districts that we've been expressing this concern and Representative, if there's an interest in the SDE playing a more active role to lessen the burden, we can have a dialogue about that. What I'm concerned about, and Representative Ackert, I've heard you share this concern and express it. This is a moment of multiple burden of compound burden for Districts. Even good ideas in some instances ought to wait until Districts can work through the requirements of a Common Core and evaluation, and school turnaround and their own initiatives. That's the reasoning.

REP. ACKERT: Great. Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate your answers and thank you for being here.

STEFAN PRYOR: Thank you, sir.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Representative Ackert. I will pose two brief questions to be followed by Senator Boucher to be followed by Representative Giuliano. First, on the state education resource center, there are some who have come to members of this committee who have said the record of quasi-publics in this state is not good and having the resource center become a non-profit seems like a safer path in some ways than creating another quasi-public that may head off in an unintended direction. I'd like to give you a chance to respond to that concern.

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STEFAN PRYOR: Sure, I'd be happy to. We would welcome any structure that offers optimal accountability, transparency, and adherence with state law. Our feeling was bringing the entity closer to state government rather than keeping it further away was the better idea. A non-profit exists more independently of state law by virtue of its corporate structure so we felt like a quasi-public governmental entity was a better idea.

There already was some confusion around SERC's legal status and whether because it had a fiduciary entity which was a non-profit, a university in fact, serving as it's umbrella, there already was some confusion around SERC in that era where there was that non-profit fiduciary entity even though SERC's own status was ambiguous. So we felt it was more clarifying and it was more in accordance with all of our wishes, mine certainly included, that we establish real clarity and therefore we established it in our proposal as a quasi-public.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you. That's helpful. The other brief question, I didn't fully understand your response to Representative Ackert's question. The bill that he referred to, 5520, would essentially ask the state department to create a curriculum that would be available to Districts on an as demanded basis. So, a District that wanted to use this for children who were having trouble with their study skills could and another District that felt they already had that area covered could chose not to avail themselves of the option. So why would we not want to make this additional supplementary skill set and

and make sure your microphone is on. Let us know your name and where you're from and what you like to testify about.

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CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: Good afternoon. My name is Christopher McCray, I'm a student. I'm here to testify for SERC being a state agency. SERC has many different resources that are good for students. I am a student myself who is in college who is about to graduate, has used many of these resources and have also helped with the task force and the task forces for students who are transitioning into college and giving them the accommodations and the needs that many parents get the resources to.

I truly believe that SERC should be a state agency because these resources are very valuable to students for their education, the accommodations and to also understand the resources for when they get to a college level they need these accommodations to be successful.

REP. FLEISHMAN: Thank you for your testimony and for your service. Quick clarifying question, so the bill before us would make SERC into a quasi-public agency, not a full state agency, but one that had public representation on its board and so forth but had some independence. Are you in support of that or are you saying that you would prefer over that approach a pure state agency approach?

CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: I'm in support that it should be an individual -- the first one you said.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Quasi-public.

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CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: Quasi-public.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Quasi-English so it's understandable it wouldn't stick in your head, no worries about that. Any other questions from members of the committee? Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Christopher, thank you for coming today. I'm right -- nope, this way. It's tough I know, we need a light to go off or something. But, thank you, Christopher. You don't need to be specific of services were provided you, but could you just give me one or two services that SERC has helped students that you know of?

CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: Well the resources are very helpful. Going to their conferences and they actually -- they give the student's a voice. So they research and then using the state, the SERC library, were able to come up with presentations and many different resources that are important to students. They have that voice so they're able to interact with students and they're able to get to a college level. I myself read many of these resources and they still help me and I'm a senior in Belleview University. So they're very helpful and those resources I think need to be spread all over the state because kids really need that voice and they also really need those presentations to help them get to the next level.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Christopher. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. Right in front of you, right here. Well all these lights, I know, it's hard. First of all, congratulations as you get ready to graduate from college. That's wonderful. When you were in high school, do you remember if any of the SERC materials were used by your teachers?

CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: Well, I found them in college. I really didn't have the opportunity like most students to hear all the information and knowledge that SERC gives out. Now that it's actually spreading a little bit more through these conferences, students are able to get a better understanding how college is going to be like so they don't end up dropping out or they have a hard time in their first year of college, they're able to get those resources that they need. I myself wish I had those resources, but I had to use my accommodations and everything by myself. And I met SERC once I started college and they have been helpful in even giving me resources to this day.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Well, that's great. We're glad to hear that the resources are being used so well. Are you comfortable sharing with us what you're going to do after college?

CHRISTOPHER McCRAY: I'm working on being an educational consultant.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Well, you know that's great. I wish you as we all do, we wish you continued success and I'm sure you'll be applying to SERC for a job. Thank you, you're very well spoken. We appreciate it.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Madame Chair. Are there other questions for the young man? If not, Michael, thank you very for your testimony. Best of luck to you and by the way, SERC does employ many educational consultants, thus the reference. The honorable Minority Leader, Larry Cafero to be followed by student Mikayla Lessard.

LARRY CAFERO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Chairman Fleishman, Senator Stillman, Ranking Members Ackert and Boucher, honorable members of the committee. For the record, my name is Larry Cafero, State Representative of the 142nd District, also serve as the House Republican Leader. I am not an educational professional but I am a parent and I guess I'm speaking on the two bills that concern Common Core that are before you today, House Bill 5331 and House Bill 5078.

I guess my plea is, not only of course to do what you are doing today and listen to all those stakeholders and people that have been affected by it, but also to be open to Legislative change if necessary, if in your wisdom you believe that that is necessary. And here's why I say that. Historically we heard some history of Common Core but as a member of the General Assembly back in 2010 and prior to that, I don't think we even heard of the words Common Core. We were told as legislators that Common Core was a set of new higher expectations of what Connecticut students should know as they progress through grades kindergarten through 12th grade, higher standards if you will.

There's Not a person in this room whether

REP. FLEISHMANN: Melodie Peters to be followed by Representative Terrie Wood if she's still in the area.

MELODIE PETERS: Good afternoon.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Good afternoon and welcome. And if you and your --

MELODIE PETERS: Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishman and members of the committee.

REP. FLEISHMANN: If you could in addition to introducing yourself, make sure the person you brought with you introduces herself that would be great.

MELODIE PETERS: I will, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have Patty Fusco with me who is the Vice President for AFT Connecticut overseeing our Pre-K through 12 council and any specific sort of questions that you might have about education I thought would best come from a practitioner.

So I am Melodie Peters and President of AFT Connecticut. We're getting to be familiar with one another. I do represent 29,000 members; 15,000 of those are school related personnel, teachers, including paraprofessionals and school nurses. I'm going to be very brief because I have a number of comments to make and we'll start with Senate Bill 425, the state educational resource center. I'll simply say that 94 percent of its funding comes from public dollars whether it's national or state funding and it should operate, in my opinion, in our opinion, truly as a state agency and not a quasi-public agency. We

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were a bit disappointed that that was the choice that was taken by the State Department of Ed.

On House Bill 5520, which is the availability of online study skills curriculum, the bill doesn't specify how the instruction would be provided in this format. Generally students that need this kind of remediation need more of a one on one experience. And so we would welcome a study on the effectiveness of this in the K-12 settings and would appreciate your taking no action on House Bill 5520 unless you decide to study it further.

On House Bill 5521, the epinephrine, did a very good job representing all her constituents. I would just simply say that you know as an organization we have been promoting and championing a nurse in every school and this is a perfect example of why we do need a trained medical person on board.

Now the paraprofessional staffing levels, I thank you for recognizing this need and we would ask that you create a mechanism to understand the full impact of the losses that are created by our loss of paraprofessionals in the education system and make recommendations for improvement. I urge you to act favorable on House Bill 5523.

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Now, probably the two bills that everybody wants me to comment on, one would be House Bill 5078 and that's the moratorium on the Common Core state standards. I just love what Joe Cirsuola said. I really do. And we don't agree on all things, but I did love what he said, that not giving -- by

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, and I'd like to, except there was no question mark at the end, so that's again, an exception that we want question marks at the end.

If we could go now to, thank you very much for your time, your patience, your testimony.

SENATOR MARKLEY: And Mr. Chair, and I want to thank Representative Wood who switched spots with me so I could get Dr. Stotsky in here. Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you. Marianne Kirner, to be followed by the gracious Terrie Wood.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Good afternoon. Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Marianne Kirner, and I'm the Executive Director of the State Education Resource Center, known throughout Connecticut as SERC.

I'm here today to express my support and the support of my SERC colleagues for Raised Bill Number 425 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER.

SERC welcomes the changes that would result from this bill, which includes clarity about SERC's legal status and the establishment of a governance board.

Both of these actions will enable us to carry out SERC's mission, a mission supported by the General Assembly and the Connecticut State Department of Education for decades.

Should this bill pass, we look forward to working with you, the State Department of

Education and the SERC board in a partnership to ensure SERC's continued viability.

We believe the bill you have outlined will enhance SERC's service to educators, students, state agencies, service providers and perhaps most importantly, families and community members, particular service on behalf of students with disabilities, students of color, English language learners and others represented by Connecticut's achievement gaps.

Thank you for your opportunity to speak about the bill. I know you have a full agenda today and there's certainly a lot of other voices you need to get here in the room. You have my written testimony, so at this point I'd be happy to answer any questions that you have.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and your service. A very brief question based on previous testimony. Someone pointed out that SERC is 94 percent funded by public dollars from various streams and that based on that it seemed like nonprofit status might be most appropriate. I'd be happy to hear your response.

MARIANNE KIRNER: It is true that as we stand this year, 90 percent of our funding is federal funding that flows through the State Department of Education.

And so I think the concerns about nonprofit, they go back a number of years and they actually surfaced here in this Committee, who was concerned about if SERC was moved to nonprofit, that that board could choose to take SERC in a direction that may not be in keeping with where the General Assembly or the State Department would like it to go.

So I believe that's why we're supportive of not moving in that direction at this point in time.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you for that concise, clear and helpful answer. Other questions from members of the Committee? Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I believe that, probably a follow up. So the way the language is put in this legislation for the quasi-public, without changes you believe that this will fit the needs of SERC going forward?

MARIANNE KIRNER: Yes. Thank you for that question. We believe so. We would welcome the clarity that the quasi-public provides us. We have that lack of a very clear legal status has been something that has interfered with our ability to move forward and secure funding in other ways for quite a while now.

So having that clear, legal status, having a board to be involved in that, fund raising might not be the right word, but that you know, procurement of resources beyond the federal dollars would be welcome.

The voices that a board would bring to the table, we think we would find supportive.

We, the one question that I have, you implemented Public Act, excuse me, the number is slipping my, Public Act 13-286 last year, which clearly stated that SERC was a state contracting agency. That was also very helpful. We had always operated, for the most part, under those guidelines and then the one incident that we did have, where we were asked to go with a no-bid contract, the confusion around the legal status and the fact that there wasn't the clarity that you've now put into

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place, that became, that will help us moving forward, that we clearly are.

So my question is just, does what was in Public Act 13-286, does that still stand and will that still be a part of the new quasi-public?

REP. ACKERT: Thank you. And then you mentioned dollars, additional dollars. Would they be philanthropy dollars, you go, other grants, or besides the federal dollars?

MARIANNE KIRNER: Yes, sir. I can give you two examples where we had an opportunity. We applied for philanthropic dollars and the funder was very excited about the work that SERC has done, was very excited to partner with SERC.

When they recognized that the actual 501c-3 status belonged to our fiscal agent and not actually SERC, they became concerned and they had to back away and told us to come back when that was clarified.

The most recent example is, we actually applied for an I-3 grant, which is a part of the Race to the Top and it was put out for universities and nonprofits to apply, not the typical state agency money. We wrote a grant and it was rated very high. The feedback we got back from the readers in Washington was, we were almost led to believe that we were the number one ranked grant.

When they again realized that they would be awarding that grant to our fiscal agent, because that's where the federal identification number is, they again became concerned and actually disqualified us from the competition.

So I think we're hoping, with the guidance of the board and this Committee, that we can help keep SERC robust and moving forward through both philanthropic dollars as well as other federal and other types of grants that we might be able to apply for that we can't right now.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you so much for your testimony, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you, Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for being here. I know you've been here as has anyone else for quite some time. We appreciate it.

And as you know, this is an important issue that was raised by the Committee last year --

MARIANNE KIRNER: Absolutely.

SENATOR STILLMAN: -- and auditors report, et cetera.

Can you, the bill calls for and you just mentioned it in your testimony, the Connecticut School Reform Resource Center.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Yes.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Could you help us understand what that's going to do that SERC, is this something that SERC does not do now, and what is the school, what is meant by school reform?

MARIANNE KIRNER: I appreciate that question. A great question. We currently do try to have a School Reform Resource Center at SERC. We have the Special Education Resource Center; we have the Connecticut Parent Information Resource

Center and we do have a School Reform Resource Center.

Right now, the School Reform Resource Center at SERC has basically a federal grant that's working on multi-tiered systems of support, PBIS, and we also have placed under that center our direct work with school districts regarding PBIS and excuse me, that's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, but that's fee for service.

So I think one of the things we're excited about with the School Reform Resource Center as it's listed in the current legislation, it's the kind of thing that we could begin to collaborate with others on and the kinds of either technical reports, research or programming that perhaps we can collaborate on funding to then have, be a part of the School Reform Resource Center.

SENATOR STILLMAN: By school reform, it covers topics other than the ones you've mentioned such as special ed. Is this in relationship to some new kind of curriculum or teaching? I want to make sure we're not talking about reform school.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Yeah. No. I think it's just the continued, it's more the word reform I think is to help school districts actually examine their practices and move to better practices, and so it would include, certainly a lot of data examination and when a school district or a school is struggling with perhaps a certain population of the students, that we could provide technical assistance to help reform their practices in order to meet the needs of more students to help close achievement gaps.

So I don't think it's, you know, it's not a curriculum or something special that they're going to be asked to reform. The word is used broadly.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. The other, I'll give you a two-part question here. Number one, and I apologize if this was asked about Rensselaer.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Uh-huh.

SENATOR STILLMAN: How are you going to transition from them being the fiduciary to, you know, obviously you're going to have to transfer that authority to SERC.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Uh-huh.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And also, in that as you look at moving SERC forward as a quasi in another area, do you anticipate increasing your personnel?

MARIANNE KIRNER: Again, a great question. Thank you very much. In terms of the transition from Rensselaer, we've already begun the conversations with both them and the State Department of Education that obviously we can't transition overnight, and so the conversations, and it was actually as a matter of fact included in the Commissioner's report that he submitted in January, that talked about that, based on the timing of the transition what's the actual effect date?

We would have to have some period of time that we would work with Rensselaer in order to make sure that payroll was protected and that bill still got paid.

I have a question in terms of, you know, once the bill is passed and there's an official start date, does that position us to go and get

the federal ID number, or do we have to wait until the board is seated and then the board, you know, authorizes the Executive Director to go get the federal ID number.

So, we're trying to work through some of those things in conversation with both Rensselaer and the State Department of Education.

But I think the plan at this point is to see about definitely something along the lines of six months but wording it in such a way that if we needed a little longer, that that could occur as well.

In terms of quasi-public, and starting to get a handle on what that means, we've begun doing our research hitting the books and hitting the libraries in terms of reading what other quasi-publics are, how they're structured, how they work. We've also approached a couple and asked them if we could actually just come talk to them about how they handle things like their finances, their fiscal, their HR department and that kind of thing.

Those meetings are scheduled for later in the month. We are making the legislation the priority at this point in time.

In terms of increasing the staff, I think we will definitely need to consider increasing fiscal, because right now we pay Rensselaer and with the State Department's contract with Rensselaer, they handle everything from having the bank account to the checking account to hiring the auditors, to preparing the monthly reports, and so all of that would have to slowly move internally.

They do hire ADP to do the payroll, so we have been having conversations about just

transitioning that from being paid for by Rensselaer to being paid for by SERC. But just the everyday basics of cutting the check and entering the accounts payable, the accounts receivable, we are going to have to have additional staff to do that to replace the people that currently reside at Rensselaer.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And I would assume it's unclear as to how many people we're talking about.

MARIANNE KIRNER: I think that's one of the reasons we'd like to approach some of the other quasi-publics. We've tried to judge those that are about the same size we are, have about the same amount of personnel as we do, have a somewhat similar amount of budget as we do, to get a sense. How big are your HR departments? How big are your finances, you know, your finance office and use that to prepare recommendations.

We're also hoping that the board will bring us expertise in that area that perhaps some members of the board will have a financial background or expertise in that area that could certainly help guide us to doing this correctly.

REP. FLEISHMANN: Thank you. Are there any other questions for Miss Kirner? If not, thank you very much for your testimony, and your time.

MARIANNE KIRNER: Thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISHMANN: So it's been brought to my attention that we have students who are waiting to give testimony, and it is the tradition of the Committee to try and bring students forward at the outset as we had done for Christopher.

A VOICE: (Inaudible).

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**EDUCATION
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I still think it's causing a lot of stress, especially for the teachers. I think the parents may be a little more accepting of it because they've been given more information, but the idea for the teachers of all of these things coming at them at once, just as a lot of people have testified to today, I think is a very similar feeling of frustration.

And the combination of a new test coming in and tying that to a teacher evaluation system on top of writing a new curriculum is certainly not something any professional should have to deal with.

REP. WALKO: Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions from members of the Committee? If not, thank you again for your succinct testimony and your patience. Ray Rossomando to be followed by Patrice Peterson.

RAY ROSSOMANDO: Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando. I'm a Research and Policy Specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. I'm here today to speak on Senate Bill 425. We come in opposition of the bill concerning governance of State Education Resource Center.

As you probably recall, the State Department of Education brought forward a very similar bill to this bill last year. We opposed the bill last year. We were concerned about loosening the provisions of transparency, freedom of information and other protections of the public interest.

This Committee did great work in passing a bill that ensured those protections. Our concern is

that passage of this bill this year would unravel those protections and risk reversing the progress that you've made.

Quasi-entities are somewhat rare, complex operations that don't happen in state agencies that often, and there are four particular reasons.

You might have a complex issue that you might have to address, whether it's public finance, complex financing, economic development, waste to energy. Those are the sorts of things that are not traditionally governmental functions that are given to quasi-agencies.

Certainly, education is not one of these complex, questionable, functions that are questionable public good. Education is clearly a public duty fulfilled through public institutions.

Also, quasis and even SERC, which is what this bill is about, have troubled histories when it comes to transparency. SERC over the last couple of years and there's been a decade-long history of issues with transparency and no big contracts with numerous of the quasi-entities.

CEA supports clarifying SERC's role as a state agency and ensuring the protections of public interest are secured, and so we urge opposition to this bill and we ask you to restore the provisions of transparency and to give good consideration to including SERC as a state agency. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there any questions? Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Ray, good to see you.

RAY ROSSOMANDO: Good to see you, too.

REP. ACKERT: Earlier testimony, and I thank you for your concise input. I was hoping to hear some of that. But SERC representative was here earlier and she talked about the hurdles of some grant dollars in terms of, if they go to the quasi-public, which I understand that this one is a little different than some of the ones that we have existing, a little bit tighter regulations. That I'd have to still look into.

But she had mentioned opportunities that they have going this route with getting more philanthropic dollars, donors that would support. Do you think we would still be able to do that process if we go the route that you suggest?

RAY ROSSOMANDO: I thought she also made some reference to federal dollars as well, to the best of my recollection, and I don't, I'm sorry?

REP. ACKERT: Yeah, about 90 percent of it is public dollars. The rest are money that they go after.

RAY ROSSOMANDO: Sure, absolutely. Certainly there are provisions in state law now that allow the State Department of Education and other state agencies to accept private donations, and I think so long as there's transparency around that and informing the public where this money is coming from, I think that's something there is a precedence for in state agencies, so I don't see that as being a hurdle.

I understood her comments to be a hurdle in her existing structure with some other grants that moving to a different structure might solve,

and I think moving to a state agency could solve those same problems.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, and that's exactly what she did say. In the existing structure that they have now, working with Renssalaer, I believe and being a different entity, so thank you for that clarity and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I'm just curious, Ray. Has CEA made an effort to quantify the increased cost to the state to (inaudible) SERC when you become state employees?

RAY ROSSOMANDO: I think beyond our expertise in quantifying the impact on the teacher retirement system, I'm sorry, on the state employment retirement system. Certainly many of the employees already participate in the state teachers retirement system, so if there were to be a transition to a state agency we'd have to look at how those employees would transition to a state employment retirement system if they're not already covered under the state teachers retirement system, but we don't have that data. We have not done that analysis.

But, one more comment, sir. When you do look at the bottom line employee number that was issued in the report in March just earlier this month, it is about a million dollars of employee benefits and salaries, so it's not a significant amount. It's only to have the transparency and to drop the five hundred some odd thousand dollars that I think they're paying to Renssalaer as a fiduciary relationship and I think the net benefit is for the public good.

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REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there questions?
If not, thank you for your time and your
patience to testify.

RAY ROSSOMANDO: Thank you for your time and
patience.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Patrice Peterson, to be followed
by Sheila Cohen if she's still here.

A VOICE: She testified with (inaudible).

REP. FLEISCHMANN: To be followed by Jessica
Higgins, if she's still here. Welcome.

PATRICE PETERSON: Thank you. I do have to take a
point of personal privilege because it is rare
for me and for any citizen to be able to have
the honor of appearing before both their State
Senator and their State Representative and I
feel very fortunate that that's me tonight,
although I would have appreciated it if it were
me this afternoon.

Hi. My name is Patrice Peterson, and I am the
President of CSEA-SEIU Local 2001. We are a
union that represents 27,000 active and retired
publicly funded employees across the State of
Connecticut.

CSEA also represents part of their group, the
education administrators who are part of the
state's P3A bargaining unit, and on behalf of
the P3A bargain unit, I submit this testimony
opposing Senate Bill 425.

I have my full testimony that's written. I'm
just going to use a couple paragraphs here.
The P3A members are education consultants who,
among other things, supervise training programs
for school teachers, administrators,
professional staff and paraprofessionals. They

provide oversight for school construction projects and administer many federal and state funded programs for the State Department of Education. Many P3A members have terminal degrees and are nationally known for their leadership and expertise.

By all appearances, Senate Bill 425 would legitimize the outsourcing of the P3A bargaining unit work to SERC. By establishing SERC as a quasi-public agency, the bill risks turning SERC into a shadow agency not subject to the same oversight, transparency and accountability of other state employees, state agencies, but maybe that's their intent.

In its present form we will not support this legislation. The bill raises many questions for us. For example, will SERC fall, contracts fall under the State Department of Education's review and oversight for the State Contracting Standards Board? There are a number of other questions.

There are also many examples that P3A work will be unnecessarily duplicated as wasteful expenses of tax dollars. For example, in Section 2v, SERC is to establish a Connecticut school reform resource center and the listed functions of the center describe work that the P3A members already do in the turn-around office of the State Department of Education.

Every education professional is invested in providing the best services to the students and families in Connecticut. We want children to learn to assist teachers, administrators, professional staff and paraprofessionals in improving their skill-set, and work with parents and communities to build schools in which teaching and learning occurs.

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However, nobody wants to see Connecticut turn SERC into something that operates outside the established and respected parameters. With that status, they'll be functioning without a level of transparency required of all state agencies.

Additionally in these trying financial times, using tax dollars to fund an action which are already done by state employees is unacceptable.

We are eager to meet with members of the Education Committee to improve this piece of legislation and for the effectiveness of SERC. At CSEA we are committed to ensuring that Connecticut schools are models for this country. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Senator Bye.

SENATOR BYE: You know, Patrice, I just want to thank you for hanging in there and I know you were here all morning preparing for another hearing today that lasted a long time, so I thank you for your patience and for representing your members so well.

PATRICE PETERSON: Thank you. It's unusual when you get to appear before the same person twice in the same day, two different Committees.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other comments or questions? If not, thank you.

SENATOR BYE: Almost not the same day.

PATRICE PETERSON: That's true. What's for breakfast?



Ray Rossomando
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Education Committee

Connecticut Education Association

Governance
Shella Cohen, President
Jeff Leake, Vice President
Pat Jordan, Secretary
Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer
Kathy Flaherty, NEA Director
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An affiliate of the
National Education Association

Re: SB 425 AAC Governance of the State Education Resource Center

March 12, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 members who are active and retired teachers across the state.

We testify today in opposition to SB425, which would establish the State Education Resource Center (SERC) as a quasi-governmental agency. A better option would be to define SERC as a state agency.

Furthermore, PA-13-286 clarified SERC's status by requiring it to comply with the Freedom of Information Act, competitive bidding, public auditing, and personal service contracting laws applied to state agencies. SB425 appears to wipe out some of these important protections.

SERC's Pattern of No-bid Contracts and Unaccountable Outsiders' Influence

SERC was established in legislation as an entity of the state under CGS 10-4q (PA 05-245, Sec. 24). The SERC entity created in 2005 replaced or subsumed an entity formerly known as the Special Education Resource Center.

While SERC has long been respected for providing education support to school districts, its more recent activities have compromised its reputation. SERC recently awarded a contract worth \$250,000 to a group led by anti-public education activist Michelle Rhee. Prior to that, SERC was used to funnel state tax dollars to outside entities to draft Connecticut's 2012 Education Reform bill.

Materials from a Freedom of Information request uncovered instances of contracts being executed without bidding and SERC serving as a conduit for influence over legislation that violated the public's right to know.

For example, email threads released in the FOI request show:

1. The no-bid contracting of services to a private firm (Education First) to "help Connecticut policymakers draft human capital legislation that tie [sic] new evaluation results to reforms in tenure, certification/licensure, layoff, dismissal, and professional development policies."
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know who is drafting legislation affecting our children's education?*
2. Outside sources, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSS) being tapped to pay for consultants to influence policies under development by the state's Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC).
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know that the state sought to have CCSSO fund the development of policies affecting schools? Who else funded these efforts?*
3. A state contract to institute education reform policies being influenced, orchestrated, screened, approved, and practically executed by DSA Capital's William Cox, who was not an employee of the state.
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know who William Cox is, what interests he represents, and how he was able to orchestrate and approve a no-bid state contract and have it executed by SERC?*

The Legislature's Options

PA 13-286 also required SDE to study and report on options for reconstituting SERC as a quasi-public agency, state agency, or nonprofit organization. SDE was required to indicate its preference. It is unfortunate that SDE submitted a proposal for a quasi-governmental entity that is nearly identical to the one it submitted prior to studying other options. In SB425, SDE proposes the reconstitution of SERC as a quasi-governmental agency an arms-length away from the oversight, transparency, accountability, and other protections of the public good that apply to state agencies.

Alternatively, the legislature could make it crystal clear that SERC is in fact an entity of the state, subject to disclosure laws that are in the public interest. In doing so, the legislature could, among other points:

- Clarify that SERC is a public agency subject to Connecticut's fair and open contracting laws, freedom of information requirements, and public auditing.
- Require SDE to annually report all state contracts awarded by SERC and the purpose of such contracts, including the names of consultants operating under personal service agreements or other non-employee based designations.
- Require SERC to report all costs of salaries, fringe benefits, and other compensation expenses.

An Argument Against Reconstituting SERC as a Quasi-Governmental Agency

Quasi-governmental agencies operate an arm's length away from state government oversight and public transparency. Consequently, their operations have a spotted history in Connecticut. Over the past decade, quasi-governmental agencies in Connecticut have too often failed the public good. From unsecured investments of public dollars in Enron and outrageous executive bonuses to no-bid contracts and accusations of cronyism, the good work of quasi-agencies in Connecticut has been marred by well documented failings and perceptions of wrongdoing.

According to OLR (2005-R-0772): "The major reason for establishing quasi-public agencies here was their organizational location outside the structure of state government, which meant they could avoid many of the requirements and controls imposed on governmental agencies." The state's 11 quasi-governmental agencies fall primarily into 3 categories: Complex financing, waste-to-energy, and targeted economic development. By putting a quasi-governmental agency in charge of education policies affecting Connecticut children, we would be setting a troubling precedent.

The Table prepared by OLR shows the public protections absent from quasi-governmental operations. While using a quasi-governmental structure could be appropriate for certain complex public functions, the oversight of our public schools is not one of them.

TABLE 1: Applicability of State Government Controls to Quasi-Public Authorities

Control	CDA	CII	CHEFA	CHESLA	CHFA	CHA	CRRA	CHWMS	CCEDA	CLC	LFCCEA
Budget	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bonding	No *	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Personnel	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Purchasing	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Contracting	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Affirmative Action	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
UAPA **	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Code of Ethics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FOI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State Auditors	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: LPRIC's report entitled *Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority and other Quasi-Public Agencies*

UAPA- Uniform Administrative Procedure Act

FOI- Freedom of Information

*Under insurance mortgage program the State Bond Commission issues bonds, the proceeds of which are funneled through the Department of Economic and Community Development to CDA.

**The law requires all quasi-public agencies to follow certain guidelines when adopting its procedures (similar to the UAPA's notice, publication, and approval requirements but without the need for legislative approval) (CGS § 1-121)

We strongly urge committee members to reject SB425 and clarify SERC's status as an entity of the state subject to laws that apply to state agencies and ensure oversight, transparency, accountability, and other protections of the public's right to know.

Thank you.



Patrice Peterson
President
Stephen Anderson
Secretary/Treasurer
Robert D Rinker
Executive Director

March 12, 2014

General Assembly
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. No. 425 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER.

#B5523

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Patrice Peterson and I'm the president of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a union that represents 27,500 plus, state, municipal and private sector employees and retirees across the state of Connecticut. I'm also a special education teacher for the Department of Developmental Services. CSEA represents Education Administrators who are part of the state's P3A bargaining unit. On behalf of CSEA's members in the P3A bargaining unit, I submit the following testimony opposing Senate Bill 425.

Education Administrators in the P3A bargaining unit are an important and key component in Connecticut's education infrastructure. P3A members are education consultants who, among many other work functions, supervise training programs for school teachers, administrators, professional staff and paraprofessionals; provide oversight for school construction projects; and administer many federal and state funded programs for the State Department of Education (SDE). Many P3A members have terminal degrees and are nationally known for their leadership and expertise.

By all appearances, Senate Bill 425 will legitimize the outsourcing of P3A bargaining unit work to the State Education Resource Center (SERC). By establishing the State Education Resource Center as a "quasi-public agency", Senate Bill 425 risks turning SERC into a shadow agency not subject to the same level of oversight, transparency and accountability as other state agencies. Maybe that is the intent. In its present form we cannot support this legislation.

The bill raises many questions. For instance, will SERC contracts with CSDE fall under the review and oversight powers of the State Contracting Standards Board? Does the legislation legitimize CSDE's transfer of federal and state grant funds to SERC, amounting to more than 12.8 million dollars, for work which is already done by members of the P3A bargaining unit? Does Senate Bill 425 change the current scope of SERC's programmatic activity? It appears that the answer to all these questions is 'yes'.

SERC was originally created in 1969 to "assist the State Board of Education in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence." SERC's work was predominantly limited to issues impacting students with special needs. It was not created and should not be modified to act as a parallel entity to the types of educational work currently performed by state employees. This duplicity is even evident in the job titles for SERC's professional staff, which mirror the P3A bargaining unit (e.g. Education Consultants, Education Service Specialist)

There are several examples on the face of the bill of P3A work being needlessly duplicated at the wasteful
(*Continues on other side.*)

expense of taxpayer dollars. Section 2(b) calls for SERC to establish the "Connecticut School Reform Resource Center." The listed functions of the Center describe work P3A members already do in the Turnaround Office of SDE.

Moreover, Section 2(a) permits SERC to "support programs and activities concerning early childhood education." This suggests that SERC may position itself to compete for the federal and state dollars earmarked for early childhood professional development and training. The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood was established in 2013 to coordinate and improve the various early education programs and components in the state in order to create a cohesive high-quality early childhood system. Therefore, SERC also displays redundancy with the Office of Early Childhood.

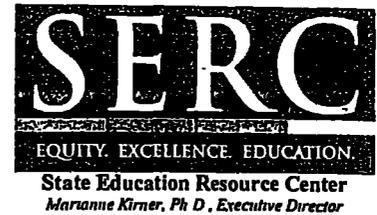
Every education professional has a vested interest in providing the best services to the students and the families of Connecticut. We want to help children learn; assist teachers, administrators, professional staff and paraprofessionals in improving their skill set; and work with parents and communities to build schools in which teaching and learning occurs. However, nobody wants to see Connecticut turn SERC into something that operates outside established and respected parameters. With that status they will be functioning without the level of transparency required of all state agencies. Additionally, in these trying financial times, using taxpayer dollars to fund action which is already performed by state employees is unacceptable.

CSEA members are eager and ready to work with members of the Education Committee to improve this piece of legislation and the effectiveness of SERC. We recommend the General Assembly establish a committee (legislators, educators, administrators, parents, CSEA members, community members) with membership beyond CSDE to further study viable options that are cost-effective, efficient, transparent and accountable for SERC.

At CSEA, we are committed to ensuring that Connecticut schools are a model for the nation.

In aid of that commitment, CSEA also supports H.B. No. 5523 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFFING LEVELS.

Patrice Peterson
President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001



***Testimony of Marianne Kirner, Ph.D.
Executive Director, State Education Resource Center
Before the Education Committee
Regarding Raised Bill No. 425: "An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center"
March 12, 2014***

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Bye, Representative McCrory, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Marianne Kirner, and I am the Executive Director of the State Education Resource Center (SERC).

I am here today to express my support and the support of my colleagues at SERC for Raised Bill Number 425, "An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center."

This bill not only allows us to continue a 45-year collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), it also positions us to further SERC's work on behalf of children and families. Our collaboration with the CSDE has served our stakeholders well. Last year, over a quarter million educators, service providers, families, and community members benefitted from SERC's professional development, technical assistance, library resources, and website.

SERC provides professional development in every critical area in education, including special education, culturally relevant pedagogy and discipline, early childhood, and school-family-community partnerships. We have steadfastly advanced the interests of students with disabilities since the establishment of the Special Education Resource Center in 1969. The case of P.J. v. State of Connecticut provides an example of how SERC has made a difference. In 2002, the U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut, approved a settlement agreement regarding high-quality inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities. SERC was part of a comprehensive system of training and technical assistance to ensure progress toward the settlement agreement's goals. At the conclusion of the case in 2012, the presiding judge commended SERC, noting that: "The efforts made by SERC were designed to extend and improve regular class placements, and the data demonstrate that those efforts were effective" (2:91-CV-180 (RNC), p. 54).

SERC has also made an impact by assisting families and schools to identify practices that facilitate partnerships. As you know, student success depends heavily on family engagement in education. The Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC) at SERC provides professional learning opportunities for educators on strategies for collaborating with families, including how to promote literacy and reading in the early grades. It also provides information and support to families on educational systems and structures. CT PIRC was initially established through a federal grant and is now sustained primarily through fee-for-service.

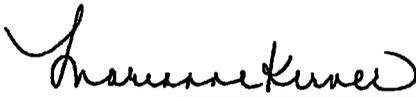
The demand for SERC expertise with English Language Learners and students of color is skyrocketing, including at the preschool level. The teachers we serve consistently praise SERC's ability to prepare them to work cross-culturally with both families and children. As one teacher said during an interview with the New Britain Herald, "The training taught me how to be more open-minded. There were not as many ethnic groups when I grew up in Newington. It's important to be able to relate with different cultures."

We support Raised Bill 425, particularly the following points:

- **The bill will provide the necessary clarity about SERC's legal status.** We welcome this step, as it will strengthen SERC's long-term viability and enable us to carry out the unique mission that the General Assembly and the CSDE have supported for decades. As a quasi-public agency, SERC will have its own Federal Identification Number (FIN) for use in securing private funds and federal grants. We recently submitted a federal grant application that was scored very highly, and yet an award could not be made due to the fact that SERC had to use our fiscal agent's FIN.
- **The bill will establish a governance board.** We welcome the voices that will become a part of SERC's efforts to achieve its mission and vision of equity and excellence in education. We believe in the value of diverse perspectives and expertise. These can work only to strengthen our programs and services. We look forward to partnering with board members who share our particular passion for the education of students with disabilities, students of color, English Language Learners, and families.
- **The bill maintains the Special Education Resource Center at SERC with federal funds granted to the state, enabling SERC to deliver services seamlessly through the transition period.** The bill also continues support for the establishment of the **Connecticut School Reform Resource Center**. We are especially excited to invigorate this center in close collaboration with the new board members and the CSDE.

Having led SERC for over 25 years, I can assure you that our agency is strong and viable. With your continued support, SERC will continue to fulfill its mission to provide high-quality programs and activities with transparency and in collaboration with policy makers, state agencies, educators, families, and community partners.

Thank you.



Marianne Kirner, Ph.D., Executive Director



Ray Rossomando
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Education Committee

Re: SB 425 AAC Governance of the State Education Resource Center

March 12, 2014

Connecticut Education Association

Governance
Sheila Cohen, President
Jeff Leake, Vice President
Pat Jordan, Secretary
Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer
Kathy Flaherty, NEA Director
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An affiliate of the
National Education Association

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 members who are active and retired teachers across the state.

We testify today in opposition to SB425, which would establish the State Education Resource Center (SERC) as a quasi-governmental agency. A better option would be to define SERC as a state agency.

Furthermore, PA 13-286 clarified SERC's status by requiring it to comply with the Freedom of Information Act, competitive bidding, public auditing, and personal service contracting laws applied to state agencies. SB425 appears to wipe out some of these important protections.

SERC's Pattern of No-bid Contracts and Unaccountable Outsiders' Influence

SERC was established in legislation as an entity of the state under CGS 10-4q (PA 05-245, Sec. 24). The SERC entity created in 2005 replaced or subsumed an entity formerly known as the Special Education Resource Center.

While SERC has long been respected for providing education support to school districts, its more recent activities have compromised its reputation. SERC recently awarded a contract worth \$250,000 to a group led by anti-public education activist Michelle Rhee. Prior to that, SERC was used to funnel state tax dollars to outside entities to draft Connecticut's 2012 Education Reform bill.

Materials from a Freedom of Information request uncovered instances of contracts being executed without bidding and SERC serving as a conduit for influence over legislation that violated the public's right to know.

For example, email threads released in the FOI request show:

1. The no-bid contracting of services to a private firm (Education First) to “help Connecticut policymakers draft human capital legislation that tie [sic] new evaluation results to reforms in tenure, certification/licensure, layoff, dismissal, and professional development policies.”
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know who is drafting legislation affecting our children's education?*
2. Outside sources, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSS) being tapped to pay for consultants to influence policies under development by the state's Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC).
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know that the state sought to have CCSSO fund the development of policies affecting schools? Who else funded these efforts?*
3. A state contract to institute education reform policies being influenced, orchestrated, screened, approved, and practically executed by DSA Capital's William Cox, who was not an employee of the state.
 - *Shouldn't the public have a right to know who William Cox is, what interests he represents, and how he was able to orchestrate and approve a no-bid state contract and have it executed by SERC?*

The Legislature's Options

PA 13-286 also required SDE to study and report on options for reconstituting SERC as a quasi-public agency, state agency, or nonprofit organization. SDE was required to indicate its preference.

It is unfortunate that SDE submitted a proposal for a quasi-governmental entity that is nearly identical to the one it submitted prior to studying other options. In SB425, SDE proposes the reconstitution of SERC as a quasi-governmental agency an arms-length away from the oversight, transparency, accountability, and other protections of the public good that apply to state agencies.

Alternatively, the legislature could make it crystal clear that SERC is in fact an entity of the state, subject to disclosure laws that are in the public interest. In doing so, the legislature could, among other points:

- Clarify that SERC is a public agency subject to Connecticut's fair and open contracting laws, freedom of information requirements, and public auditing.
- Require SDE to annually report all state contracts awarded by SERC and the purpose of such contracts, including the names of consultants operating under personal service agreements or other non-employee based designations.
- Require SERC to report all costs of salaries, fringe benefits, and other compensation expenses.

An Argument Against Reconstituting SERC as a Quasi-Governmental Agency

Quasi-governmental agencies operate an arm's length away from state government oversight and public transparency. Consequently, their operations have a spotted history in Connecticut. Over the past decade, quasi-governmental agencies in Connecticut have too often failed the public good. From unsecured investments of public dollars in Enron and outrageous executive bonuses to no-bid contracts and accusations of cronyism, the good work of quasi-agencies in Connecticut has been marred by well documented failings and perceptions of wrongdoing.

According to OLR (2005-R-0772): "The major reason for establishing quasi-public agencies here was their organizational location outside the structure of state government, which meant they could avoid many of the requirements and controls imposed on governmental agencies." The state's 11 quasi-governmental agencies fall primarily into 3 categories: Complex financing, waste-to-energy, and targeted economic development. By putting a quasi-governmental agency in charge of education policies affecting Connecticut children, we would be setting a troubling precedent.

The Table prepared by OLR shows the public protections absent from quasi-governmental operations. While good arguments could be made for using a quasi-governmental structure to carry-out certain complex public functions, the oversight of our public schools is not one of them.

TABLE 1: Applicability of State Government Controls to Quasi-Public Authorities

<i>Control</i>	<i>CDA</i>	<i>CII</i>	<i>CHEFA</i>	<i>CHESLA</i>	<i>CHFA</i>	<i>CHA</i>	<i>CRRA</i>	<i>CHWMS</i>	<i>CCEDA</i>	<i>CLC</i>	<i>LFCCEA</i>
Budget	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bonding	No *	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Personnel	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Purchasing	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Contracting	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Affirmative Action	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
UAPA **	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Code of Ethics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FOI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State Auditors	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: LPRIC's report entitled *Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority and other Quasi-Public Agencies*

UAPA= Uniform Administrative Procedure Act

FOI= Freedom of information

*Under insurance mortgage program the State Bond Commission issues bonds, the proceeds of which are funneled through the Department of Economic and Community Development to CDA.

**The law requires all quasi-public agencies to follow certain guidelines when adopting its procedures (similar to the UAPA's notice, publication, and approval requirements but without the need for legislative approval) (CGS § 1-121)

We strongly urge committee members to reject SB425 and clarify SERC's status as an entity of the state subject to laws that apply to state agencies and ensure oversight, transparency, accountability, and other protections of the public's right to know.

Thank you.



March 11, 2014

To: Education Committee

Subject: Testimony - Re: H.B. No 425 – An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center

My name is Milly Arciniegas, and I am a parent of a child in the Hartford Public School system and the Hartford Parent University Executive Director.

I fully support H.B. No 425. The State Education Resource Center has an opportunity to work and collaborate with a Board of Directors to preserve over 45 years of history of service on behalf of Connecticut's children and their families and maintain a partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education by becoming a quasi-public agency.

SERC has a tremendous history with the State Department of Education and we believe this will help build a much stronger governance structure and SERC will be in a better position to continue to provide excellent services to Connecticut families and children.

Thank you for your time.

State Education Resource Center (SERC) TESTIMONY

In 1979 I moved to Hartford, CT to work as a Bilingual Special Education teacher in the Hartford Public Schools. Soon thereafter, I learned that the State Education Resource Center (SERC), formally known as the Special Education Resource Center, was an excellent resource for research information to support students with disabilities. Equally important, I had access to testing and supplemental materials to evaluate their skills and to enhance their academic program.

When I was appointed Principal of Barnard Brown Elementary School in Hartford, SERC was instrumental in the design and implementation of professional development that met the needs of the faculty and staff. During this time SERC also conducted structured needs assessment that provided us with the necessary information in the following areas: student academic achievement, student behavior and emotional needs, available school resources and staff professional development needs. This assessment was instrumental in the design of an action plan that met the needs of the students and strengthened the professional experiences of the staff.

The action plan was implemented by working closely with teachers in their classrooms and demonstrating effective strategies in reading, math and language arts. Data collection and analysis were also another area in which SERC provided professional learning to my staff. They utilize an effective collaborative approach to professional development.

By working very closely with teachers in their classroom, the staff at SERC earned their admiration and respect. Teachers scheduled meetings with the SERC staff, including during their lunch time. It was evident that they valued the advice of these professionals.

The results were impressive; our special education referrals declined, student achievement and behavior improved dramatically.

SERC provides expertise in systems change and in working with underrepresented students and families. Their staff has a vast understanding of the challenges that educators working in urban areas face as they look for opportunities to enhance the academic experiences of their students and families. During my tenure as an Assistant Superintendent for Learning Support Services in Hartford Public Schools I worked with SERC designing Parents' Forum to provide information to families about current issues in education. The success of these events was due in part to the expertise in organizing events of this magnitude and the quality and expertise of the presenters.

I support SERC governance structure as a quasi-public agency, working in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Respectfully,



Miriam Morales Taylor

Director of Student Services

New London Public School



Testimony of
Melodie Peters
President, AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Education Committee Hearing
March 12, 2014

SB 425 An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center

HB 5520 An Act Concerning the Availability of an Online Study Skills Curriculum

HB 5521 An Act Concerning the Storage and Administration of Epinephrine at Public Schools and Institutions of Higher Education

HB 5523 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Paraprofessional Staffing Levels

HB 5078 An Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

HB 5331 An Act Concerning the Implementation of the Revisions to the PEAC Guidelines

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Melodie Peters and I am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 29,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you to testify on a number of bills before you today.

SB 425 An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center

Last session, the General Assembly acted to address concerns many of us shared about the lack of transparency in the State Education Resource Center (SERC). In 2012, in the name of expediency, the State Department of Education bypassed clean contracting requirements by awarding several no-bid contracts to private consultants through its non-profit, SERC. Though it is funded primarily by public funds received by the US and State Departments of Education, SERC was not required to follow these protocols.

Public Act 13-286 clarified that SERC was in fact a state agency for clean contracting purposes and required it to comply with state procurement and competitive bidding requirements. In addition, it required the Commissioner of Education to report annually to the General Assembly (1) all contracts issued to private contractors and RESCs; and (2) the amounts and sources of all private funding used to pay State Department of Education employee and consultant salaries. It also required the Commissioner to submit a plan to transition SERC to a quasi-public agency, state agency or nonprofit. We are disappointed that SERC, through SB 425, has decided to pursue quasi-public status.

We fear that SB 425 could allow SERC to undo the contracting provisions required in Public Act 13-286 unless Section 2 (c) is clarified:

(c) The State Education Resource Center shall be subject to rules, regulations or restrictions on purchasing, procurement, personal service agreements or the disposition of assets generally applicable to Connecticut state agencies, including those contained in titles 4, 4a and 4b of the general statutes, section 4e-19 of the 2014 supplement to the general statutes and the corresponding rules and regulations.

With a mission so central to futures of Connecticut's residents and more than 94% of its funding coming from public dollars, we believe that SERC should operate as it truly is – a state agency, rather than quasi-public agency.

HB 5520 An Act Concerning the Availability of an Online Study Skills Curriculum

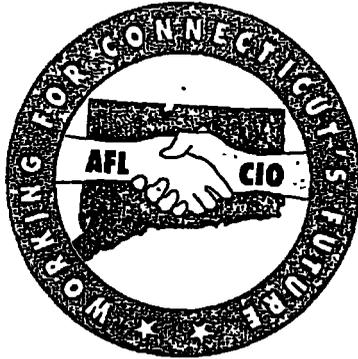
As an organization of educators, we question the effectiveness of online coursework to provide remedial study skills to students. This bill does not specify how instruction would be provided in this format. Generally, students in need of remediation did not fully grasp the material being taught and require the assistance of an educator to present the material again, often in a different way. They greatly benefit from the personal instruction and interaction only a teacher or paraprofessional can give. There is a place for computers in education, but they cannot replace the one-on-one instruction that struggling students need.

Rather than require SDE to provide these unproven resources to districts, we would welcome a study on their effectiveness in K-12 settings before rolling them out for district use. I urge you to take no action on HB 5520.

HB 5521 An Act Concerning the Storage and Administration of Epinephrine at Public Schools and Public Institutions of Higher Education

AFT Connecticut appreciates the intent of HB 5521, but recognizes that this bill and others like it have been introduced over the last several years to circumvent the fact that we do not have enough nurses in our schools. HB 5521 would authorize epinephrine to be stored at schools so that it may be administered by unlicensed personnel to students who have no prior authorization for the drug. Nurses are trained to skillfully assess student needs. Even without a doctor's order, they could determine when it may be appropriate to administer epinephrine to a child who may be experiencing an allergic reaction for the first time. That much seems workable. It is troubling to suggest that all teachers, administrators, coaches or paraprofessionals are qualified to make these kinds of judgment calls.

We do not believe it is unreasonable for coaches, special education teachers and special education paraprofessionals who have received specialized first aid training to make appropriate determinations about using an epi-pen *if a student has been diagnosed with an allergic condition and has a standing doctor's order for its use*. HB 5521 removes the requirement of the doctor's note and puts students and unlicensed personnel in a very precarious situation. What a teacher without medical training may view as a student with an allergic reaction may in fact be a student experiencing something completely different, such as a seizure or a stroke. Administering epinephrine in a case like that could do more harm than good. No teacher, administrator, coach or paraprofessional should be giving drugs without a



Testimony of the Connecticut AFL-CIO

Before the Education Committee

March 12th, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

We submit this testimony on behalf of the 900 affiliated local unions who represent 200,000 working men and women from every city and town in our great state on the following:

We oppose S.B. 425 An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center. The Connecticut AFL-CIO has taken a position that transparency should be required for any entity that receives any public funding. In its own report to the General Assembly dated January 15, 2014, SERC states that 94% of its budget is funded with federal dollars passed through the State Department of Education and state appropriations. It makes no sense why an entity that is overwhelmingly funded with public dollars and serves a core public mission would be considered a quasi-public agency. There is nothing "quasi" about SERC. In order to preserve transparency and General Assembly oversight of SERC's key role in delivering quality public education, we urge the committee to reject this bill and instead follow the precedent set by Public Act 13-286, which clarifies that SERC is a state agency for purposes of contracting requirements. Any entity that relies on taxpayer dollars to fund 94% of its budget is a state agency.

We support H.B. 5523 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Paraprofessional Staffing Levels. While the AFL-CIO has supported maintaining teacher levels and funding efforts, tight budget constraints in most municipalities have drastically reduced the staffing levels of paraprofessionals. These reduced levels have also lead to the disruption of a paraprofessional's primary role in the education process as they are often rotated into other roles outside of classrooms as well as adding burdens to families of the children that need additional attention of paraprofessionals. This is not fair to the student, the teacher or the class they are normally assigned to. We are hopeful that this bill will go forward to address the full impact of reductions and the necessary value of paraprofessionals within all schools.

Respectfully Submitted,

Todd G. Berch

Field Director



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
Testimony of Commissioner Stefan Pryor
March 12, 2014

HB 5520
SB 425
HB 5523

Sen. Stillman, Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Boucher, Rep. Ackert, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for offering the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on a number of the bills on your agenda.

I would like to focus my spoken remarks on HB 5078 and HB 5331, the Common Core and evaluation bills.

Committee members, the debate about the Common Core in Connecticut should be about how best to prepare for the future by moving forward rather than how to defend the past while moving backward. Together, we should be finding new and better ways to help our districts, schools, teachers, and students with the transition to the new standards, not prohibiting the state from providing assistance precisely when such support is needed.

The Common Core is fundamentally about preparing our children for their futures: in college, in careers, and in life.

Looking to our colleges, over 70% of the state's community college students require remediation, as well as nearly 20% of students entering the Board of Regents' state universities. Higher, college-aligned standards can better prepare our current students for their futures in college – and help leave behind the past of students and families going into debt just to receive remediation.

How about careers? Two-thirds of Connecticut businesses that are seeking new employees report that they are having trouble finding qualified workers for their businesses. Now, while not every job requires that a worker be a college graduate, the jobs of the future will in fact require increased preparation: by 2020, 70% of our state's jobs will require postsecondary education.

Connecticut's past academic standards, the Connecticut Frameworks, were adopted in 1998. The Connecticut Mastery Test was first developed even earlier, in 1985. These previous standards are not making the grade – as evidenced by the problematic results at the college and career level that I've just outlined.

The nation is moving forward into the era of college- and career-ready standards. 45 states have adopted the Common Core. Just last week, the College Board announced that the SAT college admission exam would be redesigned to better align with college and career ready standards. Do we in Connecticut want to be left behind as other states move in this direction? We risk harming our students if we hold them back – requiring them to remain in a bygone era.

The changes we are seeking in Connecticut's schools are important – and, yes, they are difficult. That's why we've worked hard to ensure that there's a transition period for educators and students – one that involves **low stakes and high support**. This year, we deliberately gave districts the choice of which state test to use – the old or the new – and removed the stakes from the Smarter Balanced test for two years so that teachers and districts have time to adjust. No tie to teacher evaluation for two years. No changes to school classifications in the accountability system. No connection to high school graduation requirements. **By the time we reach 2015-16**

and the new tests count for any of these purposes, Connecticut will have had nearly six years of transition time. That's since 2010, when the Common Core standards were adopted.

The state has a big role to play to help with the transition to the Common Core. Already, we've brought together over 1,500 teachers from 163 districts to train them as coaches equipped to train their colleagues, and we are recruiting teachers for "The Connecticut Dream Team" to serve as Common Core ambassadors for other teachers. More direct trainings are on the way for spring and summer. In the meantime, we've launched CTCoreStandards.org, an online resource of sample unit and lesson plans for teachers and leaders to access around the clock. Thanks to the Governor and this General Assembly, this was the first year that included a line item in the budget to support such efforts. These trainings are just the beginning; there is undoubtedly more to do. We will work closely with Governor Malloy's just-appointed Common Core educators' taskforce to find meaningful ways to improve our supports for school districts. We hope the taskforce can assist us in further developing ways to help especially those districts that have gaps in their readiness – so we can target our support, working together with RESCs and even enabling districts to partner with one another.

A few brief remarks on HB 5331. The changes to educator evaluations proposed in this bill are unnecessary, since PEAC is empowered to modify the evaluation system guidelines in consultation with the State Board of Education. Worse, it cements in statute key rules regarding which districts have sought flexibility. Perhaps unintentionally but definitively, this bill therefore reduces their options. For example, some districts are moving in the direction of using multiple, shorter, informal observations – this bill would make such locally developed ideas impossible.

Honorable members of this committee, as our young people consider their goals and aspirations for the future, they seek to meet the requirements of the colleges and the workplaces they'll be entering. What will we do to help them? Will we shirk our responsibility, defensively holding on to the past and refusing to embrace the future? Or will we demonstrate Connecticut's commitment to our students' success, marshal our resources, and do what it takes to prepare our young people for what's ahead? The challenges our young people face – Common Core or no Common Core – will not simply go away if we ignore them or debate them. These challenges are real. Colleges are demanding more than we're currently delivering. Employers are doing the same. Let's show our students we're not going to run from these challenges and hope they disappear. And let's show that we will not hold local communities and educators back by senselessly prohibiting the flow of needed resources. Instead, let's step up our supports and strengthen our commitment to our schools, teachers, and students.

HB 5520: AAC the Availability of an On-line Study Skills Curriculum

We would like to take this opportunity to express the view that districts are already overburdened and, while study skills are important to future success, encouraging districts to offer specific curriculum topics is another mandate at a time when they are already overburdened. The Department would prefer that this legislation not move forward at this time.

SB 425: AAC the State Education Resource Center

The Department appreciates the Committee's further consideration of this important subject. Per the General Assembly's request, since last session, we have undertaken additional examination of the State Education Resource Center and its roles and interactions with the Department. This study was submitted to the Committee in January. As required by statute, revisions to the report were submitted at the beginning of this month, including a legislative proposal to transition SERC to a quasi-public agency.

March 12, 2014

General Assembly
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

SB425

RE: H.B. No. 5523 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFFING LEVELS.

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is George Gould. I am a resident of West Hartford and Union Representative for Connecticut Paraprofessional Educators with CSEA SEIU Local 2001. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5523: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Paraprofessional Staffing Levels.

This Bill long overdue. I have been negotiating municipal contracts for paraprofessionals for many years and even the title "paraprofessional" is insufficient for today. Today's paras have evolved into Education Specialists. Paraprofessionals have evolved from being moms in the classroom, to working with the most challenging and difficult children in the school system. Today's paraprofessionals provide job training for students transitioning into the community, and even bathroom assistance. They work with children in early childhood programs, students on the Autism Spectrum, the hearing and sight impaired, children with developmental disabilities, and even the medically fragile. Today's paraprofessionals work with such a diverse group of students and perform such a wide range of work that it's difficult to pigeonhole them into a single job title.

We need to study and develop a best practices approach to para-educators in the classroom so that we can have the appropriate staffing levels and trainings to meet the needs of the students they serve. Some may say that these needs have already been addressed—they have not talked to the paraprofessionals. Anecdotally, paras are more than occasionally assigned to students without specific information concerning the child's needs or knowing issues developed in IEPs or 504s, for which they are responsible but without the training necessary to meet those needs.

As has been done in many States across the country, Paraprofessionals have been left out of the discussion in determining the solutions to issues that our paraprofessionals experience in the classroom on an almost daily basis. There needs to be at least a good cross-section of paraprofessionals and representation from the areas they teach that are on this committee.

Because of the diversity of assignments and the gradations of those work assignments and work experience, it would be important for this committee to look at the development of a career ladder—so that paraprofessionals with the desire can move with greater ease into the teaching field, particularly in the teaching area of special education. Years of working with children as a para provides extensive experience that is valuable in the special education field. Paraprofessionals that are provided with the opportunity to achieve teaching certification would become a hiring source for replacing teachers who leave the school
(Continue on other side)

system. The advantages to that are certainly self-explanatory. In fact, many certified teachers take paraprofessional jobs when there are no vacancies using that experience to land a job when a vacancy does occur in the school system.

Paraprofessionals work better as substitutes than substitute teachers. If a paraprofessional takes over a classroom it is often as an Education Specialist that has firsthand experience with the children. Substitutes on the other hand do not see the children every day and are often dependent on the paras to provide the substitute with guidance concerning routine and teaching.

We believe that Connecticut should set the bar for paraprofessionals and be willing to go beyond what other States have done in developing staffing standards. The correct usage of paraprofessionals in the classroom would turn the greatest educational bargain in Connecticut into the best educational system ever.

I also ask that you oppose SB 425: An Act that threatens to turn the State Education Resource Center into a "quasi-public agency" not subject to the same level of oversight, transparency and accountability as other state agencies

Thank you

Submission by: George Gould
Staff Representative
CSEA SEIU Local 2001