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Before the
Education Committee

HB 7110 An Act Concerning Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate
February 22, 2019

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Bob Namnoum, and I am a UniServ Representative for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 members, including active and retired teachers across the state. We are testifying today in favor of **HB No. 7110 An Act Concerning Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate**.

CEA employs UniServ Representatives who work day-to-day with local affiliate associations and their members. We provide many professional services, from coordinating professional development activities to negotiating contracts and terms of employment. In my present assignment I service towns surrounding Hartford, and it is my experience that classroom safety is a growing concern for teachers. Every year, this concern has grown.

HB No. 7110 An Act Concerning Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate is a positive step in creating schools that have a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. The identification in the bill of disruptive or injurious incidents by means of kicking, biting, or punching is a significant standard of behavior that disrupts the educational process.

On December 19, 2018, two days prior to the winter break, Senator McCrory, Representative Gibson, and then-Senator Bye met with 34 elementary teachers of two different teaching towns to learn of this issue firsthand. Teachers in attendance were given 3 minutes to identify their grade level and briefly describe disruptive behaviors in their classrooms.

First, to be clear, these teachers' main concern was for the safety of **all** their students. They focused on the impact of disruptive behaviors on the rest of the class. With today's educational pedagogy, teachers are instructed by district policies to not put their hands on any student for any reason. The unintended consequence of these policies is when a student becomes disruptive, the

teacher is frequently left with no choice but to clear their classroom by bringing his or her students to other areas in the school, away from the disruption. Teachers continuously have expressed their concern for loss of instructional time and the impact that excessive disruptive behavior has on young students. Recently, a teacher expressed concern about the impact that the use of walkie-talkies is having on her kindergarten students. This is the communication system to the main office, and between 4 and 6 times a day, an adult in the building is communicated by walkie-talkie to ask for assistance with a disruptive student. The concern is that students are frequently exposed to such communications, and the impact of overhearing these conversations is unknown.

Senator McCrory and Representative Gibson heard from teachers about students screaming at the top of their lungs, hitting other students or teachers themselves, jumping on desks and tables, and overturning furniture. Remember, these are elementary students, and none of the teachers in attendance taught beyond grade five.

In one example, they were told of an incident with a disruptive student that took four staff members to control. Because they are not allowed to handle the child, they were forced to "surround" the child to effectively remove him from the room.

A teacher told of a student inside her room with the rest of the class holding the door from the inside, preventing her from entering the room (they were returning from lunch). She spoke eloquently of her concern for the students inside the classroom and her sense of desperation trying to get inside her classroom.

Two teachers described their wing of the building not having any projects, posters, or materials on their hallway bulletin boards because of two students who would rip down anything posted on the bulletin boards on a daily basis.

It is the hope of CEA that stories such as these will no longer need to be told. This legislation goes a long way in achieving the concept of a safe, orderly classroom where instruction and learning take place.

Thank you.