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Testimony of

Orlando J. Rodriguez

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Housing Committee

Re: SB 808 AA CONCERNING WORKFORCE HOUSING

February 14th, 2019

CEA supports SB 808

Good afternoon Senator Bradley, Representative McGee, Senator Hwang, Representative Dauphinais, and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez. I serve as the Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and as our organization's chief economist. CEA is the largest teachers' union in Connecticut, representing tens of thousands of active and retired teachers. CEA's Legislative Commission, which is composed of active and retired teachers, informs our legislative priorities.

Some of you may be familiar with the book *Snob Zones* by Connecticut author Lisa Prevost. The author provides easy-to-read accounts of how high housing costs keep many of Connecticut's middle-income households from living in the towns where they work. The author writes about Roxbury, where there is "... *not a single apartment house or condominium.*"ⁱ In Darien, the main priority of the planning and zoning commission is to maintain high property values for residents, who are among the wealthiest in the U.S. Similar situations occur in other Connecticut towns where it is acceptable for teachers, police, grocers, and hair stylists to work but not live because they cannot afford it.

The New York metropolitan area has the largest regional economy in the world, which is larger than the economy of Russia.^{ii,iii} Southwestern Connecticut sits adjacent to New York City (NYC) but many Connecticut residents cannot benefit from it. There is insufficient housing for middle-income residents in this region of Connecticut. This lack of housing dramatically reduces the number of Connecticut residents who can work in metro-NYC and benefit from proximity to its vast job market.

Connecticut is experiencing a teacher shortage in certain subject areas, which is made worse by the lack of middle-income housing where teaching jobs go unfilled. In some suburban towns

housing is too expensive for young teachers, whereas in rural towns there may be no housing and teachers have long commutes to school. High housing costs or the lack of housing makes it even more difficult to attract and keep minority teachers in towns where there are few minorities.

It is important that teachers have the option of living in the town where they teach. Teachers see their students at the grocery store, give their student servers good tips at the local diner, and are vested in the future of the town. Teachers add to the social fabric of a community by helping to keep the size of the resident population stable and by providing tax revenue to the town when times are hard.

As Connecticut looks ahead to rebuilding its roads and bridges, the state must incentivize the building of new middle-income housing so our teachers have the option to live where they work. As part of this study, the Connecticut Department of Housing should look into how mortgage assistance for certified teachers may help attract teachers to work in districts with either shortages or high teacher turnover.

We thank you for your time and interest.

Endnotes

¹ Prevost, L. (2013). *Snob Zones: Fear, Prejudice, and Real Estate*. Boston: Beacon Press.

² Statista. (n.d.). *GDP of the main industrialized and emerging countries 2017*. Retrieved February 13, 2019, from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/254533/gdp-of-the-main-industrialized-and-emerging-countries/>

³ Statista. (n.d.). *New York metro area - GDP 2001-2017*. Retrieved February 13, 2019, from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/183815/gdp-of-the-new-york-metro-area/>