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Testimony of

**Ray Rossomando**

Before the

**Education Committee**

**RE: HB 5378 An Act Concerning Integration of Social-Emotional Learning in Programs of Professional Development for Educators in Connecticut**

**March 9, 2020**

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. The Connecticut Education Association, which is an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut, respectfully submits comments regarding various bills on the agenda today.

While the Education Committee's social-emotional learning proposals regarding professional development are important pieces, they are not enough. What is truly necessary is a comprehensive approach to addressing student trauma and promoting social-emotional learning. Today you will read and hear from over 50 teachers, CEA leadership, and staff about what a comprehensive approach should include. I am testifying today to say that it is possible.

The student trauma concerns and social-emotional challenges you hear about today are shared nationwide. One state, Oregon, recently passed landmark legislation addressing these concerns as well as the perennial underfunding of schools. The Oregon experience is relevant to our own, and so I share with you a model for Connecticut to move forward.

In 2018, in response to a crisis of student trauma hitting its public schools, the Oregon legislature created a bicameral and bipartisan Joint Committee on Student Success (JCSS) to better understand what schools needed to address this burgeoning problem. The group visited 77 schools and listened to parents, educators, business leaders, and community leaders. As a result, the JCSS compiled a list of critical needs and developed a revenue plan to address them. Additionally, a group of key businesses and unions formed the Coalition for the Common Good to research revenue models.

As a result of these efforts, Oregon passed the landmark Student Success Act specifically to meet students' mental and behavioral health needs, to increase academic achievement, and to reduce disparities among demographic groups. It is funded with taxes on corporate revenues in excess of \$10 million. The act generates more than \$2 billion per year and funds critical services

and learning conditions that students need. The act establishes a special account to provide guardrails against future legislatures using the funds for non-education related purposes.

The policy areas it funds include:

- Pre-K and “relief nurseries”
- Early intervention/early special education
- New early childhood equity program
- Class size and caseload reduction
- Reduced time testing and enhanced attention to art, music, and media center resources
- Student mental health supports
- Before- and after-school programs
- Summer school, school nurses, wraparound services, and trauma-informed practices
- Expanded access to school meals
- Targeted funding to the 10 districts with greatest student needs

Meaningful accountability, transparency, and collaboration are part of the act. Districts must include educators and community stakeholders in the planning, and the state department provides technical assistance.

The state measurable outcomes include third-grade reading, chronic absenteeism rates, ninth-grade on-track, and graduation (diploma or GED) rates. Local measures can be locally determined and could include items such as a percentage decrease in room clears, class-size reductions in K-3, school climate indicators, or key measures of student engagement.

The relevancy of Oregon’s experience to Connecticut’s cannot be overstated – they are confronting the same crisis seen here in Connecticut and nationwide. Adverse childhood experiences – student trauma – and the challenges of insufficient social and emotional strategies among youth are pervasive. The solution needs to be comprehensive.

The issues Oregon found are similar to the ones we hear about from Connecticut educators. The solutions are similar too. And if Oregon can experience collaboration between corporations, educators, unions, and legislators to do right by the children, so too could Connecticut.

We can do this. We need to do this. Our students can’t wait.

Thank you.

*For more information on the Oregon Success Act, please see the following resources:*

Narrative describing in detail how the bill came about as well as the revenue system and initiatives funded:  
<http://todaysoea.org/articles/game-changing-student-success-act-to-transform-oregons-education-landscape>

The Oregon State Department of Education summary:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/COSA-ODE%20TLA%20Conference%208-19.pdf>

The budgeting detail, including how the monies are separated from the general fund:

<http://www.osba.org/News-Center/Announcements/2019/20191219CAT.aspx>

FAQ on new tax: <https://www.oregon.gov/dor/programs/businesses/Pages/CAT/CATFAQ.aspx>

Background on Corporate Activity Tax (CAT)

- A business entity has the first \$1 million of gross receipts (all money in the door before deductions and costs) exempted. Also exempted are all groceries, fuel, and hospital costs.
- Any gross receipts over the \$1 million are subject to a small (.57%) tax, but only after further exempting 35% of their business inputs (manufacturing chain) or labor costs (the entity's choice).
- It is projected to be paid by fewer than 10% of total businesses operating in Oregon.