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**TESTIMONY OF ROBYN KAPLAN-CHO**  
**CONNECTICUT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (CEA)**  
**CONCERNING HOUSE BILL 5378**

**AN ACT CONCERNING THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING  
IN PROGRAMS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS IN  
CONNECTICUT**

**BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**MARCH 9, 2020**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and members of the Education Committee. My name is Robyn Kaplan-Cho and I have been on staff with the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) representing teachers across the state of Connecticut for over 25 years.

Since I last testified before you, 193 school days have passed, and nothing has been done to address the crisis that exists in many schools across Connecticut related to student and teacher safety. The consequences remain extremely troubling – a significant loss of learning time, young children experiencing increased trauma, and staff members, who incidentally are almost entirely female, suffering physical harm. And although it might seem unbelievable, the majority of the most serious safety issues are occurring in elementary classrooms, including in pre-kindergarten.

As I travel across the state and meet with our members, they tell me heartbreaking stories. Here are a few:

*“I have to clear my classroom on a regular basis because a disregulated student is throwing books and chairs and destroying the classroom. In order to keep the other children in the room safe, another colleague had to take the rest of my students out into the hall where they waited for over an hour until it was safe to return to my room. One day it took over 3 hours from the time the students cleared from my room until they were safe to return.”*

*“Prior to becoming a teacher, I worked in an adult psychiatric facility. I felt safer there than I do in the elementary school where I now work because at least there were protections in place for the staff and other patients.”*

*“Watching the trauma that both the child who is dysregulated is experiencing and that the other young children in my class are witnessing makes me leave school in tears on a regular basis. I cannot believe that nothing is being done to help these kids.”*

The one story that stays with me the most was an incident where a student in first grade was repeatedly disruptive. The administrator would talk to him in his office following each incident and then promptly send him back to his classroom without providing any of the supports and interventions he clearly needed. One day, after he left the room to see the administrator, another student in the class saw the administrator walking him back into the room so this other student ran to the block the door, begging his teacher not to let him back in since they had just settled into their reading circle and he didn't want it to abruptly end yet again.

I could share many more equally disturbing stories but in the interest of time I will not. But if you talk to elementary teachers in most school across this state (including pre-kindergarten teachers), you will hear them describe extremely disturbing school environments that we simply cannot, in good conscience, allow to persist. There is much talk lately of the impact of trauma on students. These disruptive and sometimes violent events in school are causing trauma to all of the student in these classrooms.

CEA's *Safe and Compassionate Learning Environments Initiative* is our attempt to change this. In addition to other important proposals that attempt to get at the root causes of these disruptive behaviors, it requires districts to have a plan in place with protocols to ensure that classrooms are safe places where uninterrupted learning can take place and students get the help they need. The plans must:

1. **Identify a suitable** location for a student who has been temporarily removed from class for dangerous behavior so that educational needs can be met.
2. **Implement interventions to address underlying trauma**, such as therapeutic support; restorative practices with training; trauma-informed instruction; and strategies to improve the school climate, etc.
3. **Ensure teacher input** into the supports and interventions necessary to help affected students and protect teachers who advocate for their students from workplace retaliation – an all too familiar form of silencing teachers.

At the end of the day, these disruptive and sometimes injurious incidents are just that – a cry for help. If these proposals fail to pass, it will simply mean another 193 more days of the status quo – disrupted learning, clearing of classrooms, and a serious lack of needed supports and interventions for children in crisis.

Please act on this initiative so we can begin to implement measures to protect students and teachers from what have become serious daily incidents of educational disruption and physical injury. We need to take action to ensure that every student arrives each morning to a safe and supportive learning environment and that every teacher arrives each morning to a safe workplace.

Thank you.