

Testimony of Stacey Paley

Before the Education Committee

Regarding HB 5378, An Act Concerning the Integration of Social-Emotional Learning in Programs of Professional

Development for Educators in Connecticut

March 9, 2020

My name is Stacey Paley, and I'm in my 22nd year of teaching.

I am tapping my pencil like this so that you can experience one small thing my students have experienced this year. Imagine you are trying to learn how to add and subtract fractions with unlike denominators and put the answers in lowest terms for the first time. As you are trying not to confuse all the steps, another student is loudly tapping his pencil or water bottle or hand on the table. Your teacher has asked him to stop multiple times. You and other students have asked him to stop multiple times, but he doesn't. He says, "Make me."

Your teacher has called for assistance, but since he is not harming himself or another student, she is told to ignore it.

After about 10 minutes, you have forgotten what to do with your math, and your notes look like they have been written in another language. You ask your teacher if you can go to another room to try and work. Imagine later that day, the same student is now opening and slamming the door to the classroom. Again, he is not hurting himself or another student, so everyone must ignore it. Later still, since he has work to do and doesn't want to do it. He slams lockers closed.

This is how my students have spent many days this school year. They have also had to endure a student calling me names on a daily basis and swearing at me. My students hear other students screaming, yelling, and numerous "privacy team" calls throughout the school day. And I have it easier than other teachers in my school.

I have witnessed colleagues getting hit, kicked, bit by students, yelled at, and following students who have "eloped." My building has had several teachers out for multiple days due to injuries by students. We have also had several teachers leave in the middle of this year due to student behaviors. I have witnessed teachers crying and trying to figure out how to make it through the day. I have witnessed teachers being blamed for these behaviors, because they must have done something to cause a child to act that way.

We have participated in informational sessions on adverse childhood experiences and trauma. I don't think there is anyone who would argue that these experiences don't have an impact on children. What I have not heard is a plan to help. Simply telling teachers that these experiences exist is not enough. We are at a point where the other students in the class, as well as the teachers, are being traumatized.

We must find a way to help all of the students, the ones who are acting out and the ones who have to witness it. We owe them better than what they are currently getting.