

Testimony of
Tom Nicholas
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Committee on Education

Re:

SB 1034 AAC MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

March 17, 2021

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Tom Nicholas, and I am Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association, an organization that advocates for students, teachers, and public education. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1034 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

CEA supports innovative teacher preparation programs that attract more aspiring teachers of color into our public schools, particularly when they help aspiring teachers meet high standards of certification and address persistent institutional and financial barriers.

CEA recently received a “Grow Your Own” grant to promote clubs for aspiring educators in our public schools. Our grant is based on successful programs, like one in West Hartford run by Dr. Lara White, where dedicated teachers work with secondary school students for a future in teaching. Successful programs provide credit-bearing coursework in the foundations of education in partnership with teacher preparation programs.

SB 1034 recognizes this important connection. Should this bill become law, we urge the State Department of Education and deans of teacher preparation programs to look to this Grow Your Own model. We fully support expanding successful Grow Your Own models and would be more than happy to participate in this work.

In 2017, our local affiliate, CREC Education Association, began working with the CREC administration to develop a program to put more teachers of color into classrooms while addressing persistent institutional and financial barriers. CEA was invited to participate in this promising new program. Together, we advocated for a teaching preparation program that was unique in being designed and taught by active teachers, driven by high standards and expectations, and envisioned to promote retention.

What later became the CREC Teacher Residency Program offers to meet these critical criteria. Having just completed its inaugural cohort, carried out amidst the challenges of COVID-19, the program is promising. Although there were bumps along the road, and aspects in need of improvement, the lessons learned will make for a stronger program overall.

We support an expansion of the CREC Teacher Residency Program with support to ensure that the program can attract strong candidates, provide ongoing mentorship and guidance, and implement and model a supportive, transformational retention strategy.

Additionally, in 2019, we discovered that there were roughly 600 people of color with teacher certification who were not serving in teaching positions. While we do not know the current number, we assume that today it is not very different. We also assume that a large number of this group of certified teachers are not in the classroom for reasons of biased hiring and/or cultural and institutional environments. We support the expansion of implicit bias training – something that CEA provides on a regular basis to school districts – and particularly commend the committee for recognizing the need for bias awareness in hiring practices. We know there is much work still to be done to address unconscious and institutional biases and make our schools truly welcoming and supportive to all. We thank the committee for bringing these innovative ideas forward.

Thank you.