

Testimony of

Kate Dias

Connecticut Education Association

Before a joint meeting of the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Re:

SB 1044 An Act Concerning a Student Loan Subsidy Program

February 23, 2023

Representative Haddad, Senator Slap, and members of this esteemed committee. My name is Kate Dias, and I am the President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA supports **SB 1044** and the establishment of a loan subsidy program to address workforce shortages.

We respectfully ask committee members to ensure that the education profession be among the professions considered to be in high demand. We understand that the bill places the authority to determine high-demand professions with the Chief Workforce Officer. However, we believe that the bill could be amended to specifically include currently known high-demand professions, such as teaching, in its inaugural years.

With unfilled teaching positions exceeding 1,200 and nearly three out of four teachers in Connecticut planning to leave the profession early, the shortage of teachers needs urgent action. Adding fuel to the fire are declining enrollments in Connecticut teacher preparation programs. From fall 2015-16 to June 2020-21 the total number of graduates who completed teacher preparation programs declined from 2,132 to 1,788. That is a drop of 344 completions, or 16 percent, over five years. Establishing a loan subsidy program that includes educators is one of many strategies that we believe should be implemented.

In addition to loan subsidy programs, CEA is advocating several different ways within the purview of this committee to address the teacher shortage.

At a time when the state is experiencing unprecedented budget surpluses, there is an opportunity to deposit \$100 million of the surplus into an interest-bearing fund for public institutions of

higher education. This public fund would be akin to an endowment that could be dedicated to supporting incentives such as tuition-free teacher preparation programs for aspiring educators. Such a fund could also enhance retention by helping to offset tuition costs for coursework teachers are required to take in order to remain in the profession.

We thank this committee for drafting this important bill for a public hearing.

Thank you.