

Testimony of

Kate Dias
President, Connecticut Education Association

Before a joint meeting of the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Re:

HB 5441 An Act Concerning College Graduates Who Work in the Fields of Education or Health Care in the State

HB 6097 An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Paraeducators Who Seek a Degree in Education

February 7, 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.

We are testifying today in support of **HB 5441, An Act Concerning College Graduates Who Work in the Fields of Education or Health Care in the State** and **HB 6097, An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Paraeducators Who Seek a Degree in Education**. CEA supports **HB 5441**, which would establish a loan forgiveness program to recruit more teachers and nurses into their respective professions.

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- to June 2021, 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 forgiveness program for aspiring educators is one of many strategies that should be implemented to attract more young people to the profession.

CEA also supports tuition waivers for paraeducators proposed in **HB 6097** and further advocates that free tuition be added as an incentive for aspiring educators. In addition to loan forgiveness, CEA is advocating several different ways within the purview of this committee to address the teacher shortage. When the state is experiencing unprecedented budget surpluses, there is an opportunity to deposit \$100 million of 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 offset tuition costs for coursework teachers must take to remain in the profession.

CEA is also advocating for more welcoming policies for aspiring educators in our public institutions of higher education. Students completing their teacher training must pay for the cookie-cutter edTPA assessment process. In addition, student teachers are generally prohibited from working an outside job, making it challenging to attract lower-income students into the profession.

edTPA should be eliminated, and student teachers should be given a stipend for their time and work. While these two pieces of education preparation programs might more appropriately fall under the purview of the Education Committee, they are an essential consideration for addressing how our public institutions of higher education can succeed in turning around declining enrollments in their teacher preparation programs.

We thank this committee for bringing these critical bills up for a public hearing and commend Representatives Khan and Khanna for their proposals.

Thank you.