

Testimony of
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Connecticut Education Association
Before the Education Committee

SB 1096 An Act Concerning the Charter School Approval Process
HB 6757 An Act Concerning Teacher Performance Evaluations
HB 6760 An Act Concerning Civics Education and Media Literacy
March 1, 2023

Good afternoon to the chairmen and members of the Education Committee. My name is Don Williams, and I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association.

Today I'm testifying on three bills, including Senate Bill 1096 regarding appropriations to charter schools. CEA opposes this drastic change in state policy. Currently, the State Board of Education determines whether to approve initial certificates for charter schools. The authority for funding specific schools rests with the legislature's Appropriations Committee. As Department of Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker and Chief of Staff Laura Stefon made clear earlier, funding authority for specific schools has always been up to the Appropriations Committee.

This bill would strip away that legislative authority. The power to approve and appropriate millions of dollars to specific charter schools would rest entirely with a fourteen-member, unelected, part-time committee, not representative of the school's community, and without legislative input. This is not how the state government's balance of power and accountability is supposed to work. It would be a major abdication of critical legislative responsibility.

In addition, this bill would delete the state's commitment to require that some charter schools focus on English learners. This is a step backward and another reason it should be rejected.

CEA supports House Bill 6757, which will improve teacher evaluations, make them more useful, productive, and supportive, and reflects the work of a coalition that includes the State Department of Education, school administrators, educators, and local board of education representatives.

CEA also supports House Bill 6760 concerning civics education and media literacy. I don't need to tell you how important this is at a time when fewer than half of Americans can name the three branches of government, and a quarter cannot even name one. We must teach students about democracy and our rights so that citizens understand and protect those rights now and in the future. The bill should be amended, however, to ensure that at least three of the members of the committee are teachers and two of those are social studies teachers. I think you'd agree that it

doesn't make sense to have a committee about teaching civics without including the perspective of those who actually teach civics.

Thank you.