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Testimony of
Ray Rossomando
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Labor Committee

Re:
HB 5158 AAC Breastfeeding in the Workplace
HB 6376 AAC Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair

February 9, 2021

Good Evening, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, and I'm the director of policy, research, and government relations for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA is an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

We testify today in support of House Bill 5158 and raise additional circumstances for your consideration. We also testify in support of HB 6376.

CEA supports HB 5158: We commend the committee for the work it has done over the years to provide more sensible policies that help women balance their careers with motherhood. We support the enhancements proposed in HB 5158, which would improve privacy and convenience.

However, we believe that the bill could do much more to address the unique circumstances faced by mothers of infants who teach in our schools. Teachers spend the vast majority of their day overseeing children. Teachers cannot take break times at times of their choice. They cannot choose when to take lunch, and lunch periods are usually only 20 minutes long and often spent with students looking for guidance or company. What time teachers do have that does not require supervision, such as prep periods, is determined based on master scheduling of the student day, which often conflicts with the timeliness for expressing milk.

As a result, a quarter of our teachers surveyed this fall indicated that finding a suitable place and time to express milk was difficult. This is a remarkable statistic given that the universe answering the question included all teachers, of all ages and genders. In other words, it is likely that this concern is experienced by a vast majority of young mothers who serve as teachers in our schools.

We ask that the committee consider language for addressing the unique circumstances faced by teachers who are also mothers of infants. We offer our assistance to any committee members who wish to address this concern further.

CEA supports HB 6376: CEA has supported freedom of expression in our schools by supporting legislation prohibiting discrimination of students based on hairstyles. Similarly, CEA supports legislation prohibiting discrimination in the workplace based on traits historically associated with race, such as hair texture and protective hairstyles. Addressing discrimination across the institutions that shape society, such as schools and workplaces, is key to lasting change.

Thank you.

