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Testimony of

Melanie I. Kolek, Legal Counsel

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Labor And Public Employees Committee

Re:

SB 422 An Act Concerning the Essential Workers COVID-19 Assistance Program

March 15, 2022

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of this esteemed committee, my name is Melanie I. Kolek and I serve as legal counsel for the Connecticut Education Association, proudly representing public school teachers across our state. A majority of my practice is before the Workers' Compensation Commission.

CEA fully supports SB 422, which would extend the window of eligibility for essential workers, including educators, to qualify for pandemic pay under the Connecticut Essential Workers Pandemic Pay program. The rise of the Delta and Omicron variants reminds us of the stubborn resiliency of the pandemic and underscores the need to extend the window beyond until the public health emergency has ended.

It was and continues to be of no surprise the lengths teachers have taken to ensure they are and remain healthy for their students during this pandemic. In the past two years, we have spoken with hundreds of members of our organization who have and continue to suffer from the personal effects of the COVID virus and resulting illness, whether it is them personally or their ailing family members. Nearly every one of the teachers I spoke with got sick from a known positive contact at their school with no exposure at home or in the community. And almost every case involved the teacher spreading the virus to their family members. Teachers rightfully feared for their own safety, their students, and their loved ones by walking through the school building every morning.

Front line essential workers like our teachers and other school workers deserve our support now more than ever before given all they have been through these past two years. Please consider implementing this program for pandemic pay.

Thank you for your consideration.