

March 4, 2010

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 300 - An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for
Certain Municipal Employees

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and members of the Committee:

My name is My name is Patrice Peterson, and I am the Secretary-Treasurer of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, the Union that represents 2,600 paraeducators in 35 local and regional public school districts as well as Regional Education Service Centers across Connecticut. I am also a Special Education teacher with the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services.

First, let me talk a little about our members who work as paraeducators, which is the term now used for instructional aides, tutors, and a wide variety of other non-certified education personnel in public schools. Their responsibilities cover a wide range of job duties, including one-on-one support for special needs children and support for teachers in the classroom. They work in areas as diverse as clerical, guidance, library media centers, audio-visual and computer technology.

Paraeducators don't work for extra spending cash, but are working to provide health benefits and needed income for their families. A recent study conducted by the General Assembly found that paraeducators across Connecticut earn an average of less \$13.00 an hour, far below a livable wage.

Paraeducators enrolled in our state colleges and universities often do so without the support of educational reimbursements from their school districts. In many districts where healthcare coverage is offered to paraeducators, some are contributing as much as half the cost of monthly premiums.

At a time when staffing and retention of all public school employees are becoming critical concerns, not all local school boards have the resources to raise income standards or improve access to affordable health care for the paraeducators in their districts.

Paraeducators do vital work in our state's schools, and it is time we treated them accordingly. **To deny them access to the rights provided under the Family and Medical Leave Act is a wrong that, thankfully, you can correct.**

As we all know, the economy is requiring sacrifices from all of us. Paraeducators should not have to also sacrifice their family's health and well-being.

That is why we are urging you to **support raised Senate Bill 300, An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.**

Thank you for your time, and for hearing our voices on this critical matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrice Peterson".

Patrice Peterson

Secretary-Treasurer, CSEA SEIU Local 2001

SN:dmo