

Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5446 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHERS' DISABILITY AND RETIREMENT
BENEFITS AND PARAEducATORS' SALARY AND RETIREMENT

Title: CONTRIBUTIONS.

Vote Date: 4/1/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/12/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Appropriations Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to study changes in teachers' disability and retirement benefits, establish a minimum salary for paraeducators and provide stipends to municipalities to cover the cost difference between current and proposed salary levels. Additionally, boards of education will be required to pay retirement contributions for paraeducators. Concerns have been raised by teachers and paraeducators regarding retirement and disability eligibility, along with current salaries.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

None

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Joshua Wojcik, Acting Secretary, Office of Policy and Management (OPM): Acting Secretary Wojcik opposes the bill for several reasons. Firstly, OPM does not believe that salaries for non-state employees should be set by statute as this is a matter that should fall under the purview of local boards of education. Secondly, the bill mandates that OPM provide a subsidy to cover the difference between paraeducators current salary and the proposed \$45,000 salary starting in FY2028, which would come at an annual projected cost of \$37.8 million to \$173.6 million. Current revenue and spending cap projections would not enable for the absorption of this substantial cost. Thirdly, increased retirement contributions would strain the Municipal Employee Retirement System (MERS), and result in the need for additional municipal aid which once again cannot be accommodated under the revenue and spending cap projections.

Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller, Office of the State Comptroller: Comptroller Scanlon testified in support of the bill, believing that paraeducators should be added to the MERS, however stresses that implementation will carry additional costs to his office. Costs will be incurred in relation to start-up, and the creation of a system to calculate reimbursement to local boards of education. There will also need to be policing the requirement that employees work greater than 50% of a schedule to qualify for the MERS. He notes that the inclusion of paraeducators as a temporary, younger, and healthier class will result in actuarial gains.

Helen Sullivan, Administrator, Teachers' Retirement Board: Administrator Sullivan opposes the bill, stressing that the costs to conduct a feasibility study outweigh the benefits that would be derived from the study. Prior actuarial analyses of current post retirement restrictions in Section 10-183v of the CT General Statutes was not favorable to the solvency of the plan and found that unrestricted work post-retirement would result in increased liability to the state and the current contribution percentage of the active member population.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Carl Chisem, President, Municipal Employees Union Independent: President Chisem supports the bill, underscoring that increasing minimum paraeducator pay to \$45,000/yr. is a necessary step in the right direction to help lift paraeducators out of poverty.

Christy Kovel, State Government Relations Director, Alzheimer's Association Connecticut Chapter: Kovel testified in support of the bill, particularly the provision authorizing a study concerning disability eligibility for educators whose disabling condition begin during active employment but is diagnosed later. Alzheimer's and other dementias develop gradually over time, and individuals often experience cognitive decline that impacts daily activities and personal responsibilities before a formal medical diagnosis is confirmed.

Jason Perillo, State Senator, Connecticut General Assembly: State Senator Perillo supports the bill, specifically Section 1 which closes an gap in disability eligibility under the Teachers' Retirement System. This section would permit former teachers to apply for disability benefits when medical evidence indicates that their disability began during active employment, even if the formal diagnosis occurred. This bill will help to ensure that educators facing serious illness are precluded from the benefits they are entitled to through their service.

Kate Dias, President and Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President, Connecticut Education Association: President Dias and Vice President DeLancey support the bill, beginning with section 1 which requires the TRB to study the feasibility of reemploying retired teachers and the retroactive application of disability benefits. CEA also requested that there be consideration of a number of factors on potential rehiring of retired teachers, including but not limited to filling vacancies for 1 year terms not to exceed 5 years, limiting eligibility to teachers with at least 32 years of service, requiring districts only rehire if all options have been exhausted, etc. Finally, CEA also encourages the health subsidy increase to apply to disabled teachers and for the minimum salary to increase to \$60,000 for certified teachers.

Laura Clark, Teacher, Wallingford Public Schools and Mark Carmody: Carmody and Clark testified in support the bill, underscoring that there may be situations that arise where an educator leaves their position due to unexplained health challenges and receives a diagnosis after the fact which explains those symptoms. Carmody and Clark believes that studying

these circumstances in tandem with disability eligibility rules is a vital step towards ensuring that policies reflect both medical conditions and the long-term service that educators give to their students and communities at large.

Norma Martinez-HoSang, Director, Connecticut for All: Director Martinez-HoSang testified in support of the bill, stressing that paraeducators are struggling to make ends meet and that strengthening wages and retirement security is a necessary step to help individuals experience dignity and stability.

Drew Michael McWeeney, Assistant Professor and Program Chairperson, Department of Early Childhood Education, CT State Community College–Norwalk: McWeeney testified in support of the bill, but urges the committee to examine requirements for being a paraeducator which he believes should include more than taking a papapro exam. He raises the concern of paraeducators being paid more than teachers, even though being a teacher requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and state certification. He stresses that teacher salaries should be reflective of these considerations. Finally, he supports retired teachers going back into the classroom if they choose to without impacting their pension.

Kelly Harris Johnson, Sheri Palmer, Kristin Raymond, Katherine Stearns, Jennifer Corbeil, Karen Knauss, Jennifer McLarney, Louise Molteni, Julie Fluckiger, Jamie Tilden-Bailey, Christine Glyman, Woodward Travis, Maureen Thurz, Rebecca Burnham, Jodie Marzialo, Amy Knox, Robin Lateer, Amanda West, Lisa Viele, Paraeducators, SEIU Local 2001: Johnson et al. are in support of the bill, stressing that paraeducators are on the front lines of student learning yet are among the lowest paid staff members in schools. Paraeducators cannot afford healthcare or the increasing cost of living and have little chance of retiring with dignity unless they work multiple jobs, likely contributing to the more than 1,300 paraeducator positions vacant in districts throughout CT.

Johnson, Palmer, Raymond, Stearns, Corbeil and Knox express frustration that healthcare constitutes a large portion of their paychecks, along with a high deductible, and that earnings are volatile as they receive no pay for snow days or school holidays. Additionally McLarney, Molteni, Raymond, Stearns, Corbeil, West and Fluckiger add that paraeducators receive low pay for physically and mentally demanding work that often involves supporting students with disabilities on Individualized Education Plans (IPEs), English language learners and/or providing coverage for teacher vacancies. Passing HB would represent meaningful action by increasing paraeducator pay and ensuring improved retirement benefits.

Gloria Lewis, Stephanie Velazquez, Garcia, Crystal Jordan, Leslie Perez and Linda Randi, Paraeducators, AFSCME Local 3429: Lewis et. al testified in support of the bill, stressing that the establishment of a \$45,000 minimum salary for paraeducators is a long overdue step to acknowledge the value of their labor, retain high quality staff and strengthen the pathway for them to become teachers.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns: Gara testified in opposition to the bill, particularly the provision which mandates that boards of education pay 100% of the employee contribution for each paraeducator participating in the municipal employees' retirement system. Gara raised concerns about the long-term financial viability of the comptroller providing 50% reimbursement of contribution costs, which would strain

Gail Heath, Admin Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education: Heath testified in opposition to the bill, specifically sections 2 and 3. Heath stresses that if passed, section 2 would usurp the board of education's right to negotiate wages for employees and disproportionately harm smaller districts that have finite budgets. Additionally, Heath raises concerns about the prospects of receiving 50% reimbursement, especially when it remains unclear if the subsidies will continue in subsequent years.

Reported by: Kyle Zingler

Date: 4/7/2026