

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7010

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PARAEDUCATORS.

Vote Date: 3/21/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/26/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill was introduced to establish a health subsidy program from 2024 to 2026, aimed at helping paraeducators cover health plan deductibles if they open a Health Savings Account (HSA) or enroll in a high-deductible health plan. It also requires local and regional boards of education to pay the full employee contribution toward paraeducators' retirement benefits, with the Comptroller reimbursing at least 50% of the cost to the boards. This bill works to provide critical financial support to paraeducators, who often face lower wages and rising healthcare costs. By easing the burden of healthcare expenses and ensuring retirement contributions are fully covered, the bill promotes stability, retention, and equity for a vital part of the educational workforce.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Extends the paraprofessionals health care subsidy program to FY 27, the original bill only included FY 26.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education:](#) The Department offered testimony on the bill, stating its support for the healthcare subsidy extension but expressing significant concerns about the financial burden the requirement to fully fund paraeducators' retirement system contributions would place on local school districts.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Shellye Davis, President, AFT Local 2221](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, highlighting the challenges faced by paraeducators in Hartford Public Schools. She emphasized issues such as low pay, lack of healthcare, and limited professional development opportunities—factors that have contributed to high turnover rates and instability in schools. While supporting the bill, she argued that it does not fully address critical concerns like inadequate wages and the need for professional development funding. She called for a minimum salary of \$45,000, increased funding for training, and improved data collection on paraeducator staffing and wages.

[Jen Ensling, Manchester Teacher](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, emphasizing the crucial role paraprofessionals play in her classroom. She described them as essential for implementing IEP goals, assisting with basic needs, and supporting students with special needs. She explained how paraprofessionals learn to use specialized communication devices and help students balance independence with the support they require. She stressed that their expertise and dedication are vital to student success, and that their hard work often goes unrecognized despite the significant impact they have on both students and families.

[Allan Gadbois, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating how the bill would provide critical benefits like continued health care coverage and inclusion in the CMERS pension plan. He states that these benefits would reduce stress related to healthcare costs, retirement planning, and income stability, helping ensure peace of mind both now and in the future. Urges legislation to support the bill.

[Samantha Goodson, Educator](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating how paraprofessionals work alongside teachers to provide individualized support, assist with classroom management, adapt learning materials, and create an inclusive environment for all students. She states that their contributions help ensure that students, especially those with unique learning needs, have the resources and encouragement they need to succeed academically and socially. She also states that paraprofessionals are vital to the daily functioning of schools and the success of students.

[Marie Ackerman, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 3429](#): offered testimony in support of the bill and advocated for including paraeducators in the CMERS plan.

[Chris Majchrzak, Paraeducator and Local President, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, highlighting the struggles paraeducators face due to high healthcare costs, especially considering their low wages. He emphasized the importance of the state's healthcare subsidy in easing this financial burden. He also pointed out the lack of retirement security for paraeducators, noting that many have nothing saved for retirement despite years of dedicated service. He argued that including paraeducators in the CMERS pension plan would provide much-needed financial stability and encourage them to remain in their roles, reducing turnover and improving services for students. He urged the committee to support the bill to ensure paraeducators have access to both healthcare and retirement benefits, allowing them to continue serving students with greater security and peace of mind.

[Pietra McNamara, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the bill would contribute to the well-being of Paraeducators which will help take better care of our students. She states that this bill is beneficial for those of us who must work multiple jobs. She also states that putting paraeducators into CMERS would

encourage Paras to make a career out of the job and provide stable benefits when they retire. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Tina Mulcrone, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating how the bill's provisions, including the continuation of the Comptroller's Health Care subsidy program and inclusion of paraeducators in the CMERS retirement plan, would provide financial stability. She states that the health care funding would reduce stress and ensure access to medical care, while the CMERS retirement plan would offer financial security in retirement. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Linda Randi, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 3429:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, describing the vital role paraeducators play in supporting students, from assisting with special needs to providing emotional care, yet despite these responsibilities, they remain the lowest-paid staff in their district. She states that she still earns under \$30,000 after nearly 40 years as a paraeducator. She also states that this bill would address crucial issues like health care costs and retirement by continuing the health care subsidy program and allowing paraeducators to join the CMERS pension plan, offering greater financial security and the ability to retire with dignity. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Tracy Rose, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 3689:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the challenges of their role, making just over \$20,000 a year with high health insurance costs, despite being required to take on additional responsibilities like substituting for teachers and completing safety training. She states that paraeducators remain devoted to their students despite the low pay. She also highlights the lack of support from their school district, including the loss of seniority and the need to perform tasks like changing diapers for students up to middle school. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Stacey Tie, Secretary, Special Education Equity Kids:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that paraeducators are the backbone of special education, providing individualized assistance, reinforce lessons, collect data, and adopt materials to meet each child's needs. She states that many paraeducators face financial struggles due to low wages, high healthcare costs, and insufficient funds. She also states the critical issues this bill will address. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Hyclis Williams, Local President AFSCME Council 4, Local 3429:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that paraeducators play a vital role in supporting students, especially those with special needs, but are the lowest paid employees in the school district. They state that they face inadequate retirement benefits, with many lacking a proper retirement plan and relying on low Social Security benefits, forcing them to work beyond their years of service. Urged the committee to pass the bill.

[Pietra McNamara, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that the bill would improve the well-being of Paraeducators, enabling them to better support their students. She states that that the Health Insurance Program is particularly helpful for Paraeducators who must work multiple jobs. She also pointed out that integrating Paraeducators into CMERS would provide long-term career stability and retirement benefits, encouraging them to stay in the profession. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Daniel Boroughs, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating his role involves providing essential educational and emotional support to vulnerable students. He emphasizes that these benefits, that are in the bill, are crucial for financial stability, helping Paraeducators manage rising healthcare costs and retain a dedicated workforce. He also shared how the healthcare subsidy has been personally beneficial, aiding in the management of his preexisting health condition.

[Deborah DiPietro, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 3429:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill and put Para Educators into the CMERS Plan.

[Debra Fieldm, Paraeducator, East Hampton Public Schools:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the challenges Paraeducators face, including low wages and increased job demands, despite being crucial to student support. She states that she supports the bill's provisions on healthcare and retirement, she also emphasized the need for higher wages, as recommended by a recent Task Force. She urges the committee to amend the bill to set a livable salary, close the wage gap, fund professional development, and collect data on Paraeducator staffing and conditions. She stressed that investing in Paraeducators is essential for the future of public education.

[Diane Guz, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 3429:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating pride in her work with special needs students but highlighted the added stress Paraeducators face, including being used as substitute teachers. She emphasized the importance of treating Paraeducators equally to teachers and the need for the bill to address healthcare costs and retirement security. She states how the Comptroller's Health Care subsidy has been essential in managing healthcare costs and how being included in CMERS would provide much-needed retirement security. Urges the committee to pass the bill to help retain and attract Paraeducators.

[Brian Kurtyka, Paraeducator, AFSCME Council 4, Local 1250:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating his passion for his work and how the bill would positively impact his family and job security. He states the importance of continuing the Comptroller's Health Care subsidy program, which has allowed him to access affordable healthcare and reduce stress, ensuring he can focus on supporting students. He also states that being included in the CMERS retirement plan would provide peace of mind and financial security for his future, helping retain Paraeducators in a profession facing staffing shortages. Urges the committee to pass the bill.

[Al Paolillo, State Representative, Connecticut General Assembly:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the importance of the bill, which would provide healthcare subsidies, ensure boards of education pay full employee contributions to the municipal employees' retirement system for Paraeducators, and reimburse boards for half of those contributions. He praises the dedication of Paraeducators in his district and across the state, recognizing their invaluable role in supporting students and school communities. He reiterated his full support for the bill and looked forward to working with the committee to secure its passage and necessary funding in the state budget.

[Shannon Rodowicz, Manchester Special Education Teacher:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the vital role paraprofessionals play in supporting students with multiple disabilities in self-contained classrooms. He explains the role of paraprofessionals and

stresses that the specialized expertise and high level of responsibility required in these roles are not adequately reflected in current compensation, which makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified paraprofessionals. She urges that the paraprofessionals should have fair and competitive compensation be provided to ensure the continued success of these programs and the high-quality education of students.

[Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller, Office of the State Comptroller](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating success of the Paraeducator Subsidy Program, which provides financial assistance for healthcare costs to paraeducators, and explained how it has helped many save on their out-of-pocket expenses. He states the financial struggles faced by paraeducators, with many earning low wages and spending a significant portion on health insurance. He states the importance of supporting paraeducators to improve retention and recruitment, noting the positive impact they have on student outcomes, especially for special education students. He expressed full support for including paraeducators in MERS, he also acknowledged the logistical challenges and costs involved in integrating them into the system. He concluded by stressing that passing the bill would demonstrate the state's commitment to supporting paraeducators and help retain and attract more individuals to the profession.

[Michael Barry, Coordinator, Connecticut Coalition for Retirement Security](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating personal experience as a former paraeducator at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School in Denver, Colorado, where he helped create a tutorial program for students who had fallen behind. He states that he worked as a Juvenile Probation Officer and attended PPT meetings where paraeducators often played a crucial role but had limited opportunities to contribute. He highlighted the low pay and lack of summer pay for paraeducators, which contributes to high vacancy rates in Connecticut. He emphasized the importance of providing paraeducators with a defined pension plan, like other public service workers, to ensure they can retire with dignity.

[Kelly Cackowski, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001](#): offered testimony in support of the bill but emphasized that the bill needs to go further in improving wages, healthcare, and retirement benefits for paraeducators. She states the critical role paraeducators play in supporting students with special needs, including providing one-on-one assistance, managing classrooms, and supporting English language learners. She states that paraeducators are among the lowest paid staff, struggle with healthcare costs, and face challenges with inadequate pay during the summer and no unemployment benefits. She shared, from her experience, that the job has become more difficult, with larger student ratios, more challenging behaviors, and a lack of professional development opportunities. Urges the committee to take meaningful action to raise paraeducator pay, improve healthcare access, and provide better retirement benefits to ensure paraeducators are properly supported and students can succeed.

[Julie Cinnamon, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001](#): offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the essential role paraeducators play in ensuring all students succeed, particularly those who need additional support, such as modifications to lessons or assistance with physical and emotional needs. She states that paraeducators are not compensated fairly, with some in her district earning as little as \$584 every two weeks after taxes and insurance, forcing them to take on additional jobs. Urges the committee to support this bill.

[Jennifer Corbeil, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that paraeducators are among the lowest-paid staff, often needing to take multiple jobs to make ends meet. She shared her own experience of earning \$21,624 as a paraeducator in 2024, with additional income from two other jobs. She expressed concerns over the high cost of healthcare, citing a \$917 monthly premium, and inadequate retirement benefits, as her district offers only a 403B plan. She highlighted the severe shortage of paraeducators in her district, with 60 positions unfilled, and the impact this has on the quality of education and support for students. She urges the committee to take immediate action to raise paraeducator wages, improve healthcare affordability, and ensure meaningful retirement benefits, so that paraeducators can continue to provide the support students need without having to work multiple jobs.

[Wendy Roberts, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that paraeducators are not entry-level positions but require significant education, experience, and dedication, especially in fields like special education. She states that over the years, her responsibilities have expanded, and she now manages a substantial number of students with diverse learning needs. She also states that paraeducators face low wages that have not kept up with the cost of living. She expressed her concern that she may be forced to leave the profession due to financial pressures. Urges the committee to support the bill.

[Judy Andreko, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, emphasizing the vital role paraeducators play in supporting student learning, particularly for those with special needs. She states that paraeducators receive low wages, struggle with high healthcare costs, and have limited retirement benefits. She points out the growing shortage of paraeducators in her district, which exacerbates the challenges faced by both teachers and students. She also highlighted the inadequacy of the professional development provided to paraeducators, which often lacks relevance to their job. She expressed her pride in her work but emphasized that without higher wages and better benefits, many paraeducators, including herself, may be forced to leave the profession. Urges the committee to support the bill.

[Missy Cole, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the financial struggles of paraeducators, many of whom work multiple jobs to make ends meet. She states that paraeducators are underpaid and lack sufficient professional development. She calls for increased wages, better benefits, and more training to ensure paraeducators are properly supported. Urges the committee to pass legislation that improves wages, healthcare, and retirement benefits for paraeducators.

[Yvonne Czado, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that the bill is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done to improve wages, healthcare, and retirement benefits for paraeducators. She emphasized the critical role paraeducators play in student learning, especially for those with special needs, and noted the severe shortage of paraeducators due to low pay and unaffordable healthcare. Urges the committee to provide fair compensation and improve benefits to help paraeducators better support students.

[Jennifer McLarney, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating the importance of paraeducators in student learning. She shared her

experience of taking on various roles throughout her career without an increase in pay and highlighted that her current hourly wage of \$19.01 is not a livable wage, especially considering the rising cost of living. She states that many districts, including hers, are facing a shortage of qualified paraeducators due to low pay and are resorting to hiring temporary staff, who are paid more than experienced paraeducators. She called for further action in the legislation to ensure paraeducators receive livable wages, lower healthcare costs, and better retirement benefits, stating that improving these conditions would benefit both paraeducators and the quality of education in Connecticut.

[Holly Micca, Paraeducator, CSEA SEIU, Local 2001:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, stating that she has worked at DPS for nearly ten years and helped young adults aged 17 to 22 with job training. She expressed concerns about being understaffed and underpaid, noting her hourly wage of \$16.73 and the financial strain of high healthcare costs, which are barely covered by her paycheck. She called for increased paraeducator pay, lower healthcare costs, meaningful retirement benefits, and better resources to support students. Urges the committee to recognize the value of paraeducators and ensure fair compensation.

[Cynthia Ross-Zweig, President, CSEA Paraeducator Council:](#) offered testimony in support of the bill, emphasizing the importance of paraeducators in the education system, particularly for students with special needs, and highlighted the challenges many face due to low wages and insufficient healthcare coverage. She advocates for the continuation of the Comptroller's healthcare subsidy program, noting that it is essential for paraeducators to access medical care. She also points out that many paraeducators lack adequate pension plans, with some districts contributing as little as 1%, which is not enough to cover basic expenses. She addresses the significant shortage of special education paraeducators in Connecticut and called for a minimum wage of \$25 per hour to help fill these critical positions. Urges the committee to pass legislation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Tony Perugini, Member, Cheshire Board of Education:](#) offered testimony opposing the bill, stating that the requirement for the Comptroller to reimburse only fifty percent of these payments places a significant financial burden on districts, and believe this issue should be addressed through collective bargaining.

[Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns:](#) offered testimony opposing the bill, stating that the requirement for boards of education to pay 100% of the employee contribution to the municipal employees' retirement system for paraeducators. She states concerns that these reimbursements may be eliminated in the future, placing a heavy financial burden on municipalities, which could lead to higher property taxes or cuts to other essential services, especially considering inflation and limited municipal aid. She warns that this provision could set a troubling precedent, prompting similar demands from other municipal employees. She states that COST has supported efforts to improve the MERS system but believes this bill could undermine those efforts.

[Steve Rioux, Superintendent of Schools, Putnam Public Schools:](#) offered testimony opposing the bill stating that this bill places an unsustainable financial burden on local Boards of Education without providing the necessary state funding. He states that this bill will increase administrative costs and this benefit will be taxable and increase financial obligations. He

also states that many districts would be forced to reduce full-time paraeducators positions to part-time. Urges the committee to reconsider the bill.

[Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public-School](#)

[Superintendents](#): offered testimony opposing the bill, stating that paraeducators and their health benefits are a crucial part of the education system. While she acknowledged the \$10 million in health benefits secured for paraeducators, she argued that requiring local Boards of Education to cover the full employee share of these benefits would create an unsustainable financial burden. She emphasized that such a mandate would undermine the successful funding model currently in place and contradict ongoing efforts to improve Connecticut's public education system. She called for a focus on adequately supporting the entire educational workforce without jeopardizing the fiscal stability of school districts.

[Christine Carver, Superintendent of Schools, Bethel Public Schools](#): offered testimony opposing the bill, expressing appreciation for the health subsidies provided to paraeducators by the State of Connecticut, but it opposes the provision in the bill that requires Boards of Education to fully cover the employee contribution to the municipal employees' retirement system or any other retirement plan. She states that this requirement constitutes an unfunded mandate and should instead be addressed through collective bargaining.

Reported by: Matthew Domejczyk, Assistant Clerk Date: 4/8/25