

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-7168

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

**Vote Date:** 3/21/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 3/12/2025

**File No.:**

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to address the shortage of qualified educators in Connecticut by establishing a fund within the Department of Education to provide a tuition assistance program for students enrolled in teacher preparation programs at public institutions of higher education. It would also offer a scholarship program for teachers who have completed an alternative route to certification (ARC) program and are pursuing a master's degree. A total of \$50 million in funding to support these programs would be appropriated from the Cannabis Social Equity and Innovation Fund (SEIF). This initiative is crucial for ensuring that Connecticut's schools have a steady pipeline of well-trained, skilled teachers to meet the growing demands of diverse classrooms, improve educational outcomes, and create equitable learning opportunities for all students.

## SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute reduces the appropriation from \$50 million to \$5 million, shifts the funding source from the Social Equity Fund to the General Fund, and adds a requirement that recipients of tuition assistance must teach for five years after graduating.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[CT State Department of Education \(CSDE\), Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner:](#)

The Department of Education supports this bill, but notes that the funding is not included in the Governor's budget for the department. The proposal would create a tuition assistance program for students in teacher preparation programs at public institutions of higher education, and a scholarship program for teachers who have completed an alternate route to

certification and are pursuing a master's degree, with \$50 million allocated for the tuition assistance program. However, this scholarship would only be available to students at public institutions, limiting access for students at private institutions.

[The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity \(CWCSEO\):](#) The Commission provides supporting data on the shortage of certified educators. As of February 2025, there are 2,518 budgeted educator vacancies in Connecticut school districts and private special education programs. Research indicates that tuition assistance and scholarship programs are effective in attracting and retaining educators, particularly in disadvantaged school districts. Therefore, the CWCSEO supports this bill.

[Connecticut Social Equity Council \(SEC\), Brandon McGee Jr, CEO:](#) The SEC understands the need for programs to recruit and support teachers; however, it is strongly opposed to the appropriation of funds from the Cannabis Social Equity and Innovation Fund (SEIF) as outlined in sections 2 and 4 of this bill. The proposed \$50 million in funding is not aligned with the Governor's budget and would redirect essential resources from disproportionately impacted areas (DIA), where funds are statutorily required to be spent on equity and other initiatives in these communities.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Bria Brown, Faith Acts for Education, Educator Central High School, Bridgeport:](#) Supports this bill, adding that this funding will not only help recruit and retain certified educators, but also remove financial barriers for students interested in becoming teachers, while increasing the diversity of educators in disproportionately impacted areas of the state.

[Kiley Flynn, Treasurer, CT School Counselor Association:](#) Provides supporting testimony with an amendment to the bill's language, ensuring that School Counselors are included and entitled to the same benefits.

[Christopher Latka, Special Ed Rep and Delegate, NHFT Exec Board, School Psychologist:](#) Provides supportive testimony for HB7168, as well as support for increasing the minimum salary for all educators in Connecticut, including non-classroom teacher specialists (such as psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and social workers), as well as para-educators.

[Daniel Pearson, Executive Director, Educators for Excellence:](#) Fully supports this bill as a strategy to address the critical state-wide teacher shortage in Connecticut. Financial barriers prevent many qualified potential educators from entering the workforce, and providing tuition assistance and scholarship opportunities will expand pathways to certification for these students.

[Mary Yordon, President, Norwalk Federation of Teachers:](#) Due to the rising cost of credentials, which presents a significant barrier for aspiring teachers entering the profession, supportive testimony was provided for this forward-thinking initiative aimed at addressing the increase in early teacher retirements and the growing trend of early-career educators leaving the field for other professions.

[Steven Hernandez, Executive Director, ConnCan:](#) Supports this bill as a solution to a key root cause of the teacher shortage in Connecticut: financial barriers that prevent individuals from entering the profession. In particular, the subject areas of bilingual education, special education, and STEM fields are most affected by the shortage of qualified educators. This bill aligns with efforts to modernize the teacher pipeline and improve retention rates.

[Shannon Marimon, Executive Director, ReadyCT:](#) Supports the bill, with the recommendation to broaden eligibility for tuition assistance and scholarships to include students enrolled in teacher preparation programs at private higher education institutions and qualifying alternative route to certification (ARC) programs.

[Christopher Trombly, PhD, Interim Dean of the College of Education, SCSU:](#) Supportive of addressing one of the key recommendations made by the legislature's Task Force to Study the Comprehensive Needs of Children in the State, along with increasing teacher salaries, subsidizing the costs of tests and fees during certification, and reimbursing the cost of certification renewal.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Donna Pallanti, faculty, Albertus Magnus College:](#) Opposes the bill specifically because funding would be provided only to teacher candidates at public institutions of higher education, excluding private colleges and universities. In Connecticut, there are currently eight private colleges offering initial teacher preparation programs and undergraduate and graduate-level curricula. Teacher candidates from these programs would be denied equal access to tuition assistance if the bill passes. Another concern is the lack of funding for teacher retention, which could be improved by raising teacher salaries.

[Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges \(CCIC\):](#) Opposes the current version of bill because it does not include CCIC member institutions in the strategy to expand and diversify the state's teacher pipeline, despite the role of CCIC institutions as the largest source of education degrees awarded annually and a larger enrollment of persons of color in these programs. It is the recommendation of CCIC to consider legislation that supports need-based scholarships such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP) at both public and private institutions rather than funding exclusive to the state's public colleges only. CCIC supports SB 5 which would fund RSWP.

**Reported by: Chris Reddy**

**Date: 4/6/2025**