

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-223 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE PARAEDUCATOR HEALTH CARE SUBSIDY
Title: PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 2/27/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/23/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill makes permanent the paraeducator health care subsidy program, within available appropriations, and clarifies the eligibility of paraeducators employed in public schools with the explicit inclusion of charter schools.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, State Department of Education

The State Department of Education is supportive of the expansion of eligibility of paraeducators employed in public schools and charter schools for the health care subsidy program, as long as it is covered by the existing appropriated line item.

The Commissioner noted that paraeducators at charters schools are not currently eligible for this program because the statute references local and regional boards of education, however, there is current law which includes them in that category. Section 10-66dd(b)(1) provides in relevant part that "charter schools shall be subject to all federal and state laws governing public schools, including the provisions of sections 10-4a and 10-4b." Additionally, Section 10-66ee(g) provides in part: "Charter schools shall be eligible to the same extent as boards of education for any grant for special education, competitive state grants and grants."

Sean Scanlon, Comptroller, Office of the State Comptroller

The State Comptroller submitted testimony in support of SB-223. He believes that CT paraeducators are severely underpaid per recent salary data showing that a majority make between the minimum wage and \$20.66 an hour. Further, he stated that 66% of paraeducators who take their district's health plan reported that they must spend at least 10% of their wages to cover its costs.

Since 2023, his office has provided subsidies to paraeducators on HDHP, co-pay, and PPO plans. In 2025, 7,340 eligible paraeducators in over 160 school districts received between \$800-\$1,200 in savings depending on their plan type. Through his travels across the state, he has seen first-hand the transformational impact that the Paraeducator Health Care Subsidy Program has had and that making it permanent will retain our current paraeducators while also helping to recruit even more.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Steven Hernández, Esq. Executive Director, ConnCAN

Mr. Hernandez thanked Comptroller Scanlon for the creation of the Paraeducator Health Care Subsidy Program and highlighted that the initial program injected much needed resources to the profession. He feels this bill is a smart and equitable plan to expand the eligibility of a vital program to all CT public education paraeducators so, no matter where a paraeducator chooses to support students, they can be assured that they can afford high-quality health insurance.

Ann Kingsley, Retired Educator

Ms. Kingsley shared that paraeducators are crucial and should be paid more. She highlighted that her former para was a godsend.

Maria Matos, Chief Advocacy Officer, the Alliance for Connecticut Charter Schools (ACCS)

Ms. Matos believes that this bill provides an important clarification in statute. It ensures that paraeducators employed in public schools, including charter schools, are eligible to participate in the state's health care subsidy program. It updates the language from paraeducators employed by a local or regional board of education to paraeducators employed in a public school, and it affirms that the provisions apply to charter schools. Charter school paraprofessionals meet state qualification standards. There are approximately 120 to 140 charter school paraprofessionals statewide. Access to this subsidy would provide meaningful financial relief, reduce out of pocket expenses, and strengthen workforce stability in CT public schools. She states that this is about consistency in state policy, alignment within the public education system, and most of all, recognizing that charter school students are public school students and the educators who serve them are public school educators.

Eric Protulis Executive Director, EASTCONN

Mr. Protulis believes that paraeducators face a 'benefits gap' where high-deductible plans eat away at their modest take-home pay. He noted that this bill's language to extend the subsidy

to 'each fiscal year thereafter' replaces temporary relief with permanent respect. He feels that clarifying the annual nature of these funds will help retain the dedicated professionals that the most vulnerable students rely on every day.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Dr. Linda Dalessio

Dr. Dalessio opposes SB-223.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Michael Adams, Legislative Political Assistant of AFSCME Council 4

The AFSCME Council 4 represents over one thousand paraeducators across Connecticut who dedicate their careers to supporting Connecticut's most vulnerable students by supporting classroom instruction, managing behavioral needs, working one-on-one with students with disabilities, and contributing to the creation of safe and productive learning environments. Mr. Adams highlighted that almost every Connecticut district is struggling to recruit and retain qualified paraeducators for hundreds of vacant positions, due to low pay, unaffordable healthcare, and uncertain retirement security.

Three requests were made of the committee and the legislature. First, to prioritize establishing a \$45,000 minimum annual salary for paraeducators. He feels that a strong statewide wage floor would help professionalize this workforce, reduce turnover, and help students who depend on consistent support. Second, to move paraeducators into the Partnership Plan to provide more stable and affordable health care while also helping the state grow the pool covered to help reduce costs. Third, to include paraeducators in CMERS for a secure and dignified retirement.

Carl Chisem, President, Municipal Employees Union Independent (MEUI), SEIU Local 506

MEUI and other unions that represent paraeducators work together to advocate for professional development, fair wages, and access to healthcare and retirement benefits for paraeducators in Connecticut schools. Mr. Chisem does not feel SB-223 takes meaningful action to raise paraeducator wages (many are paid minimum wage in their sending districts), provide long-term affordable healthcare solutions, or provide secure retirement options.

Shellye Davis, President, Hartford Federation of Paraeducators AFT Local 2221; Secretary-Treasurer of the Connecticut AFL-CIO; AFT Connecticut Jurisdictional Vice President for Paraeducators and School-Related Personnel; Co-Chair of Connecticut's Paraeducator Advisory Council

Ms. Davis has been a paraeducator in the Hartford Public Schools for 34 years and believes that investing in paraeducators is a direct investment in students, teachers, families, and the future of public education.

She feels that SB-223 contains critical omissions: 1) **Raise paraeducator pay** - Without competitive wages, paraeducators will continue to leave for better-paying jobs, creating instability in classrooms and depriving students of the support they need. 2) **Provide meaningful healthcare reform** - Add paraeducators to the Comptroller's CT Partnership Plan. The current healthcare subsidy was intended as a temporary stopgap until real affordability and coverage reforms could be achieved. 3) **Strengthen retirement security** - Require boards of education to pay the full employee contribution for paraeducators enrolled in the Connecticut Municipal Employees' Retirement System (CMERS) so they can retire with dignity after careers of service. 4) **Fund professional development** - Paraeducators deserve access to training that equips them to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with special education requirements behavioral challenges, and language barriers. Investing in ongoing development is essential to student success and professional fairness.

Willie Medina, Bridgeport Board of Education Member

Mr. Medina referenced numerous biblical and religious references throughout his written testimony to highlight the necessity of prioritization, protection, and education of children. While Mr. Medina believes many proposed bills reflect thoughtful efforts to address the needs of students and teachers, he doesn't think many would be necessary if the ECS formula reflected inflation and included a true cost-of-living adjustment for the past 13 years. He stated that in his meetings with partners from across the state, education consistently rises to the top of every priority list.

Cynthia Ross-Zweig President, Paraeducator Council, CSEA SEIU Local 2001

Ms. Ross-Zweig's testimony highlighted data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics finding paraprofessionals in education are predominantly female — approximately three-quarters of the workforce. According to Ms. Ross-Zweig, when a profession largely comprised of women is persistently underpaid and under-benefited, we must ask whether we are witnessing structural inequity. She believes that when nearly 14,000 positions statewide are filled by individuals struggling to survive on poverty-level wages, that is not merely a staffing issue — it is a civil equity issue.

Connecticut currently faces over 1,300 vacant paraeducator positions. A paraeducator earning approximately \$16.90 per hour, working 35 hours per week for a 183-day school year, earns roughly \$21,640 annually before taxes. After taxes, that equates to approximately \$1,623 per month. Paraeducators are not paid during the summer. Most cannot collect unemployment — though school bus drivers can. Many receive no paid holidays. Many cannot afford their health insurance. Not everyone receives full coverage, including those on Medicare.

While Ms. Ross-Zweig recognizes that the Paraeducator Health Care Subsidy Program has made a critical difference for paraeducators, she believes that far more work needs to be done to ensure that paraeducators have access to quality and affordable healthcare.

Jessica King, Public School Educator and Connecticut Education Association member

Ms. King submitted written testimony in support of the Governor's Proposed Adjusted Budget to increase the base ECS foundation amount which hasn't been substantively changed since 2013. She believes it is the school's responsibility to provide safe, nurturing environments for all students no matter where they reside. She challenges how the vision and mission "to provide high-quality, rigorous, and accessible education that fosters student success, equity, and innovation" can be fulfilled when CT schools are disproportionately funded.

Reported by: Emily Swiatek

Date: 3/26/2026