



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing Testimony of Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker February 27, 2025

Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Weir and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I am sorry that I am unable to testify before you in person, however, I am offering the following written testimony for your consideration.

SB 1371, An Act Establishing a Just Cause Standard for Teacher Contract Terminations and Making the Decision of a Neutral Hearing Officer in Teacher Contract Termination Hearings Binding on the Parties

This proposal (1) adds a just cause standard for certain teacher contract terminations, and (2) makes the decision of a neutral hearing officer in teacher contract termination hearings binding on the parties. While we believe the first proposed change is not substantive in nature, the Department is unable to support the second change. Currently, the arbitrator makes factual findings – which are binding on the school board – but only recommends appropriate discipline, which the board can accept or reject. This change would give the arbitrator the unilateral power to determine discipline, and the school board would be bound by it. This would remove the right of local and regional school boards to make the fundamental determination as to the qualifications of individuals who teach in their systems and interact with their students. Section 10-241 expressly empowers districts to, among other things, employ teachers. Implicit in that is the right of a board to determine who it does not wish to employ. This proposed change to 10-151d would invest that power in a single arbitrator, thereby depriving local and regional school boards of the right to make the fundamental determination as to the conduct of individuals who teach in their systems and interact with their students.

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to offer testimony on this proposal, and I would be happy to meet to discuss it further.