

Written Testimony for Certification Changes Hearing

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The proposed Connecticut State Department of Education certification changes will directly impact special education students, their families, and field of special education, as we know it. The present proposed certification regulations will hinder the ability of educational systems to hire Bachelor's level staff for their self-contained classrooms or special education resource rooms. It also calls for the elimination of the present k-12 special education endorsement at the Bachelor's level. Despite a Master's track being available for those seeking to focus on a career in special education, the elimination of the Bachelor's level endorsement may perpetuate the existing shortage of personnel seeking to work in settings such as those required for the aforementioned. Although the desired goal may be to have all students educated in the most inclusive placement/class, the reality is that some of our students with significant disabilities will be best supported in a self-contained option with staff who are dedicated to their specialized instructional needs. This takes professional nurturing that often begins with student teaching experiences and initial beginning teaching opportunities at the Bachelor's level, an option that will be eliminated in this proposed certification proposal. I know this is true because it has been the path I have taken. I am proud to say I am a Special Education teacher. I have known this was my path since childhood. I have one sibling, a sister with a very rare, genetic, progressive neuromuscular disease. I grew up knowing that although we were the same in so many ways, her disease challenged her life and she had special needs. I recognized and respected these differences and the needs they created. From that time on, I understood that each of us deserve an education but the appropriate education. An education facilitated by those who were knowledgeable in the complexities their students faced. I decided this was the path I would pursue. I attended Wagner College in Staten Island, New York, and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Special Education and a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. I returned to Connecticut and immediately completed the required testing to gain my initial certificate as I wanted to teach as soon as possible. I was overjoyed when I began my professional career at C.E.S. I then acquired my Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Special Education from Southern Connecticut State University. I currently hold my professional certificate and am completing my fifteenth year as a Special Education teacher. With that said, I cannot imagine teaching without the educational foundation I was so fortunate to receive. I continue to utilize the experiences and tools I gained during those beginning years.

Although I strongly encourage a reconsideration of this certification proposal, I believe a better alternative would be a Special Education certificate. The certificate would allow candidates the ability to work in both regular and special education settings, including self-

contained settings within the public or private sector. This type of certificate would state that candidates demonstrate that they have, at a minimum, the skills and knowledge necessary in both content and specialized methodologies to be a teacher of students in either regular or special education settings. Through program based mentorships, these staff will become not only proficient, but highly skilled. If the BA/BS level programs that train special education teachers cease to exist, teachers will not be exposed to the continuum of educational settings that are presently available within Connecticut. As teachers and educators, it is our responsibility to provide for our students, all students, as this will impact their lives.