

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
Room 35

Re: Support for House Bill 8149

Chairman Abney and members of the committee:

Hello, my name is Maria Collins, I live in East Greenwich, and my state representative is Representative Evan Shanley. I work as a paraprofessional in the East Greenwich school district.

I'd like to thank Representative Edwards for putting in House Bill 8149 and I support amending this bill to include educators along with public officers and employees.

I love my job. I like making a difference in the lives of our kids. I like knowing that being there every day, supporting the children, helps make their day better. Student behaviors are much more challenging than they've ever been. On difficult days, when students are struggling and their behaviors are difficult, I can help calm them and help them get back to their education.

But I don't get paid a lot for what we do. After 20 years, I make just \$22 an hour. At 6 hours a day, I bring home \$24,000 per year. That is below the poverty level. I work two other jobs during the school year and two jobs over the summer just to make ends meet.

I'm not alone. A majority of my colleagues are barely scraping by, working more than one job.

Because the pay is so low, we are really short staffed. Not a lot of people want to come do this job for \$18.40 an hour, which is our start rate. You can make that at Starbucks and you're not dealing with kids' behaviors. The amount of work we do for the pay we get just isn't comparable.

We have a lot of responsibilities. I take my work home and do work at home like helping edit essays for students and giving feedback. I don't get paid for that extra time. I do it because I love my students and want them to succeed. The majority of my colleagues do the same. The schools would not function without us. We are vital to the children's education.

One thing we used to get is a decent pension. But now even that has been whittled down. It's no wonder we can't hire any paraprofessionals to do this vital job.

HB8149 is not going to solve this problem on its own. But it's an important step in the right direction. Passing it would show us you value our work and put an extra \$500 or so a year in the pocket of the average municipal employee. That may not sound like a lot of money to you, but for me and my colleagues, that is a lot of money.

I ask that you support HB8149 so that I can retire with dignity and the next generation of educators who share my calling will have the benefit of a fair pension.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of Bill 8149. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Maria Collins
East Greenwich
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