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Good morning Committee Chairs Sablan and Davis, Ranking Members Smucker and Allen, and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding challenges facing the teaching profession. While there is certainly room for growth in many areas, the recruitment and retention of a high-quality teaching workforce is an excellent place to start.

My name is Michael Brosnan and I have been teaching in Bridgeport Connecticut's public schools for the past sixteen years. Bridgeport is the largest district in Connecticut, serving more than 23,000 students and employing slightly more than 1,500 educators. Because this former industrial city has seen very difficult times, the number of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch is so high that the meal program is fully subsidized throughout the district for all students. Bridgeport's schools are also among the state's most diverse. In fact, at the school where I taught most recently, Warren Harding High School, nearly 90% of our students are students of color, and our 3,000 students represent more than 100 nations. Our city is ripe for reinvention, and culturally rich. But the fact is, we're plagued by perpetual under funding, and that means we face many obstacles. Teacher recruitment and retention is one of them.

I taught history at Warren Harding, for fourteen years. During that time, I had over twenty school administrators and hundreds of colleagues. While welcoming fresh faces each year, or in the middle of each year, was certainly a pleasure, it did little for school stability or student achievement. After serving as a mentor for our state teacher induction programs and as a cooperating teacher for college enrolled student teachers, it became rather clear that many of our newer folks needed significantly more preparation and support if they were to stay in the profession.

For almost two years, I have served in a different position within the district – specifically, I have been responsible for supporting new educators. I coordinate partnerships with educator preparation programs and place student teachers, coordinate and deliver over 25 hours of professional development for all first-year teachers, observe and support beginning teachers as their peer and facilitate the state teacher induction program – in short, I work with all of our teachers for the first four years they are in their jobs. Essentially, my main goal is to not have a job in a few years! I am hoping our efforts will be so successful that we will be able to retain most, if not all, of our new educators. Effectively retaining teachers will significantly close our shortage problem. Bridgeport currently has an annual attrition rate of 10% to 12%, and many of those who leave the profession are educators with under five years in the district. The hope is that through expanded professional development specifically geared toward teachers' needs, additional peer supports and an innovative approach to mentorship, we will be able to significantly reduce that attrition rate.

Recruitment of new educators remains a challenge for our district as well. Despite being a large urban district, the surrounding towns' salaries far surpass ours and, realistically, our working conditions are more challenging. The purpose of improving our student teaching programs is, in part, to welcome our newest educators to the city and introduce them to success in an urban

environment. As I mention in my opening letter to student teachers, Bridgeport is a great place to work! I student taught here 17 years ago and never left.

Despite some recent progress in recruitment and retention, there are systemic challenges that certainly go beyond my purview and I thank you for considering those challenges and potential solutions.

Barriers to Entry:

There are certainly barriers for entering the profession and obviously one of these is the cost of higher education. In most states, teachers are required to have multiple degrees in order to continue practicing; however, there is a large gap between the amount degrees cost and the salaries earned. I am sure we all agree that a highly educated teacher is an excellent asset, but unfortunately the cost associated with that has become almost prohibitive. Part of the appeal of becoming a career educator was the benefit of a pension despite a lower than average salary as compared with similarly educated professionals in other fields. But as we see in many states, even that benefit is under attack. To that end, it is vital we invest in prospective educators by protecting federal programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness, Teacher Loan Forgiveness, and TEACH Grants.

Although Bridgeport Public Schools does have the highest number of teachers of color in Connecticut, the faculty is still far from a mirror image of our students. It is important for students of color to be able to see themselves in their teachers.

In addition to these barriers, there are number of factors that deter brilliant individuals from the teaching profession. From my experience – I have had students who would have been wonderful teachers and hopefully will one day become teachers, but what they've experienced in their own schools has not sold them on the profession. The revolving door of school administrators, violence, under funding, poor salaries, visible lack of support, crumbling facilities – it isn't necessarily surprising that, despite my enthusiasm, students see the tremendous demands on educators and the difficult working conditions and would rather seek a different career.

There is also the growing strength of alternative routes to teaching where college graduates can fulfill alternate requirements and be able to enter a classroom. Many of these programs do not have the intense course work in pedagogy, social emotional learning or teaching diverse learners and therefore put their candidates at a disadvantage. While I don't necessarily believe these programs prepare as well as a traditional teaching degree, it is certainly understandable why a college student would seek these paths – they cost significantly less than a traditional educator preparation program. And realistically, they are filling a need as urban districts, such as mine, have a number of teacher vacancies at the start of each school year. A pointed focus on retention of high quality educators by districts across the nation would curtail the need for alternative routes to the profession. The student achievement data suggests that more experienced teachers are a significant factor in increasing achievement; therefore, it stands to reason that we make every effort to retain high quality faculty.

Pre-service Shortages:

Improvements are needed in both traditional and non-traditional educator preparation programs. While it's difficult to generalize even with my partner universities in Bridgeport, I can confidently say that not all graduates are "classroom ready" on day one of teaching. I think I can also confidently say that they couldn't possibly be expected to be. The programs I work with directly have varying degrees of field work prior to the one semester of student teaching. From my own experience and from having worked with nine student teachers over the years, I know that it is during this period that beginning teachers learn the most. The preservice classroom preparation is wonderful at many of our universities, but it is largely based on a research/academic model and not one of classroom or practical experience. When teaching candidates spend more time in schools, they tend to be more ready for student teaching and employment.

The importance of the student teaching experience cannot be understated. It is an opportunity for prospective teachers to discover who they are in the classroom, reflect on their practice as well as their reactions to events, and to try varied lessons, all with the safety net of a master teacher present. This is authentic learning and authentic practice.

As more and more states move towards adopting new and different performance measures for initial teaching licensure to be completed during student teaching, I wonder if this will not simply be another barrier. While I don't think this is necessarily bad, I do know that it occupies the student teacher's mind more than next week's lessons. A potential solution to this is to extend the student teaching portion for two semesters to allow for both assessment completion and true development. Of course, that adds an additional year of college to the preparation program, but if some of the financial burdens are alleviated for those who choose to serve the public as educators, it could potentially be a valuable change.

Retention:

Based on exit interviews, the number one reason teachers left my district the past four years is "lack of support." That lack of support can take many forms. It could be the biology or art teacher with absolutely no equipment or budget for materials. It could be the new teacher who was never introduced to any other faculty member or the one who was evaluated by a supervisor as if he'd already been teaching ten years. It could be the overall lack of support from school administrators, who themselves are over-worked, or the shortage of resources, such as text books, materials, and over-crowded classrooms, – regardless of the specific reason, there is one clear solution. Mentorship.

When a novice teacher is assigned or paired with a mentor, the benefits are significant. Not only is that beginning teacher more likely to stay at their school, they are more likely to stay in the profession. Most states and districts have some sort of mentorship or induction programs, but this is one practical area of focus that could begin to slow the tide of attrition.

Liam Goldrick, of the New Teacher Center, in March of 2016 included the following in his policy report "Support from The Start":

"Mentoring support makes a huge difference to teachers. We know because we ask them. A 2014 survey released by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year and the American Institutes for Research indicates that 55 percent of new teachers listed "access to a mentor" as

having the largest impact on developing their effectiveness as a teacher. A 2015 federal analysis found that beginning teachers who were assigned a first-year mentor were significantly more likely to remain in the profession than those who were not assigned a first-year mentor.”

Dr. Richard Ingersoll, Professor of Education and Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania perhaps added more urgency to the conversation about mentorship when he noted changes in the actual make-up of the teaching force. In his 2012 article in Education Week, he noted that the teaching force as a whole is getting younger and newer. He wrote that in 1988, the average teacher was a fifteen-year veteran, yet in 2008 a full 25% of the teaching force had fewer than five years’ experience. This statistic, though dated, further emphasizes the need for mentorship. While each state has its own version of induction and mentorship, it is important work as it does have direct results on our most important population – the students.

Research also shows that when first-year teachers have access to high-quality mentoring and induction, their students perform as well as the students of fourth-year teachers who have NOT had quality mentoring and induction. In other words, beginning teachers can become more skillful faster when they are mentored well. And the confidence they gain will help keep them in their schools, and in the profession.

Michael Strong, Professor of Education from the University of California, Santa Cruz, wrote in his 2006 article that took a deep look at the correlation between teacher mentorship and student achievement, show that when first-year teachers have access to high-quality mentoring and induction, their students perform as well as the students of fourth-year teachers who have NOT had quality mentoring and induction. In other words, beginning teachers can become more skillful faster when they are mentored well. And the confidence they gain will help keep them in their schools, and in the profession.

Mentoring is worth it – especially paired with the evidence that mentorship reduces the attrition rate of high-quality teachers which tends to be disproportionately higher in hard to staff urban districts. Bridgeport, like many urban districts, benefits from Title II-A funding that supports the development and retention of highly qualified teachers and principals. This investment in our instructional faculty not only addresses the staffing needs of districts, but has a clear impact on student achievement. I would urge you to fully fund Title II-A – for the benefit of dedicated educators and for the benefit of our nation’s children.

Representatives, thank you for taking the time to seriously consider ways to improve our educational system and the lives of our educators. Certainly, there is much work to be done, and I appreciate your time this morning and your work on these items.