

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1349  
Education Support Professionals - Workgroup and Bonus**

**House Ways & Means Committee**

**March 10, 2022**

**1:00 PM**

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Hartford County Education Association**

Greetings Chair Atterbeary and Honorable Members of the Ways & Means Committee. My name is Cynthia Poper and I am an education support professional(ESP) in the Hartford County Public Schools system . Today, I am providing testimony in support of HB 1349, a bill that will provide not only a bonus to ESPs, but work to find a long term solution to low wages and issues of retention.

I would like to tell you a story, In 2007 a long-time substitute teacher joined HCPS as an inclusion helper. She had a BA from Goucher College, had worked at a Fortune 500 company, and figured that this was a way to benefit her community and keep busy as her son was in school. The big plus was the monthly raise the family got because of the health benefits. The salary was family 'fun' money.

Then the crash of 2010-2011 hit. Her family, like many others, suffered greatly. They went from a 2-income family to a 1-income family. Then, they became victims of the Wells Fargo mortgage crisis and lost their home. They spent 2 months living out of a 1 room motel room. As their family income was only the HCPS salary of under \$13,500, their options were limited. They finally found a home, a rental property that they could barely afford. They managed to get their son into college, and but they were surviving.



Then, disaster hit again. In May of 2013, her husband was diagnosed with stage 4 esophageal cancer. He died 3 months later. The ESP was now living on an HCPS salary of under \$14,500/year. She did what she could. Life Insurance money was spent on the basics. There was not a penny to spend elsewhere. For two and a half years she managed it as best she could, but when that money was gone, her options became smaller and smaller. Earning under \$15,000/year was severely limiting.

In early 2016, out of options, the employee relinquished her home, as she could no longer afford it. For the second time in 5 years, she was homeless. Blessed by the kindness of friends, for 3 months she stayed where she could until she could find another solution. In July 2016, with assistance from her parents, she secured a home. But life is still not without its challenges. She drives a 17-year-old vehicle, her home needs repairs that cannot be afforded, and frugality is still a necessity.

At the age of 65, having worked for HCPS for 15 years, she earns a mere \$28,900/year. This, or a similar story, could be told by any of our systemically underpaid ESPs. It is not fiction; it is being told to make a point. It is a true story and the person that lived this story is me. The study called for in HB 1349, will help to find solutions so that we won't continue to hear stories like mine.

**I kindly urge the committee for a favorable vote on HB 1349.**