



# AFT New Jersey, AFL-CIO

629 Amboy Avenue, 3rd Floor Edison, New Jersey 08837

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## Testimony

Rose Panto, President

Monroe Township Federation of Teachers

American Federation of Teachers New Jersey, AFL-CIO

In support of S-1191 before the Senate Budget Committee

March 4, 2013

*To the Honorable Sens. Sarlo, Stack, Beck, Bucco, Cunningham, Greenstein, O'Toole, Oroho, Pou, Ruiz, Van Drew and Weinberg,*

I am a library clerk in the Monroe District. My job involves assisting fifth and sixth grade students, including special needs students, with basic library research, showing them how to use the computers to incorporate facts, write and review their papers and making sure teachers get books they need for their classes.

I also set up reading displays, troubleshoot equipment, circulate library materials to students and staff, catalog new materials and support the librarian. We teach 25 fifth grade classes per week and see approximately 20 sixth grade classes to check out books. Ours is a very busy library!

I have training for managing anti-social behavior, in classroom management techniques and health and safety training for dealing with blood-borne pathogens.

We have special needs classes that visit the library every week and I have trained both on and off the job to work with students with autism and Asperger's syndrome who require a tremendous amount of special attention individually and a modified curriculum for their classes. Like the other paraprofessionals I work with, we know and love the children, but need our jobs to pay the bills.

Most of my colleagues live in town, as I do, and many have children in the school system. I started working in the district 17 years ago when my daughter and son were both students there. I work with some paraprofessionals who have been in the district for more than 30 years and we are part of the community there.

**[MORE]**

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As our current contract expires and we go back into negotiations, the threat of privatization looms and undercuts our ability to bargain on equal terms with the district. We saw that despite community opposition, our colleagues in neighboring Winslow Township were outsourced after they voted down a contract that offered a 1/3 cut in pay.

I question whether services there have improved for the students as we are the ones who know the kids—their families, their scholastic history—so we are able to meet them at their level and work with the teachers to get the best possible results.

This legislation would provide protection for our members in contract. Our district has already subcontracted out for substitute teachers and we lost consistency from substitutes who we knew from around town, would see on a regular basis, including some who were parents of township students as well.

As a local union leader, I appreciate that the legislation expands communication with the district. We are committed to our students, the district and education. As such, our members deserve to be treated fairly and this legislation provides important protections.

On behalf of my fellow paraprofessionals in Monroe Township, Gloucester County, I offer a thank you to Sen. Allen for sponsoring this bill, and urge the Budget Committee to approve this measure. Thank you for your time and consideration to this important matter.