

Remarks of Lt. Col. Valerie Lofland
Naugatuck High School

Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee

November 14, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara and Representative Rowe, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee.

My name is Lt. Col. Valerie Lofland, and I'm a teacher of the Junior ROTC program in Naugatuck High School. I'm here today to comment on how decision-making about certification for teachers, done by experienced educators through an independent educator standards board, would most likely have prevented a recent serious situation from occurring.

A bit of background is necessary. The JROTC program has been in CT public schools for many years; each program is instituted by an agreement between the school district and the military branch. The program blends academic content with leadership skills that are necessary for all students to have to be successful in today's society. For example, in the Air Force program in which I teach students learn about the history of flight, global and cultural studies, the aerospace requirements of flight, the latest advances in space technology, citizenship and character, communication skills, managing change, and the characteristics of a good leader, among other things. The JROTC programs from the Air Force, Navy, Army, and Marines have been aligned with national standards and approved by the Department of Defense and the federal Department of Education, as have the certification requirements for JROTC instructors.

All JROTC instructors are retired military officers with a minimum of 20 years of experience in their fields in the military branch in which they served. In order to become a JROTC instructor, the officer has to have a minimum of 20 years military experience and complete a teacher preparation program that includes courses and practice teaching of secondary level students. Non-senior officers are required to have at least an associate's degree, and senior officers a bachelor's degree, in their field. The military JROTC certificate is valid for five years, and officers undergo a rigorous recertification program to remain certified.

There has been no separate CT JROTC certificate that is based on the military officer experience and knowledge. When an officer comes to CT to teach in a JROTC program, she or he has been given one of two certificates by the State Department of Education (SDE) – an 098, which is a certificate to teach a trade or industrial occupation subject in a high school, or a 110, which is a unique subject area endorsement. The requirements for both of those endorsements don't align with the JROTC military certificate and experience. This is where the problem began.

One of our military officers had a certification problem that began last fall. Although he holds a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and 30 credits toward his PhD., his coursework didn't

'match' what the SDE said he needed to move to the next level of certification. He was told he would need to take 30 credits in teaching vocational education. JROTC is not a trade, the requirements are inappropriate for what this officer teaches, and he is well qualified to teach JROTC. He questioned the SDE on this, and notified his commanding officer that he was having difficulty with his certification. In May this year, he received an email from his commanding officer saying the issue had been resolved, and his certification was all set.

In late September this year, all JROTC officers received a letter from the SDE stating that legislation had been passed in May, and as a result, a teaching certificate would no longer be required for JROTC instructors. Our understanding is that the legislation was initiated by the SDE, without realizing there would be unintended consequences. There were two caveats to this statute: First, since a teaching certificate was no longer required, JROTC teachers would no longer be eligible to participate in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS); many of us have been participants for years, and wish to continue to participate. Second, we were advised that, if a district awarded credit in a specific subject area for any portion of the JROTC program, the teacher would have to hold a 'regular' CT subject-specific teaching certificate. The example given was that, if a JROTC course included aerodynamics, the teacher would have to hold a physics teaching certificate. Since the JROTC programs are elective courses that give credits, all of us would, in essence, have to seek 'regular' teaching certificates, even though the content of our courses doesn't match the content taken to earn the regular certificate.

The military officers, our district administrators, and our students were shocked and upset. This could easily have meant the dismantling of the JROTC programs that serve hundreds of students in our schools. The SDE interpretation of PA 11-179 implied to us that they believed that, although an officer had more than 20 years of experience and knowledge in his field, he or she wasn't 'qualified' to teach the content of our program to students.

Being a CEA member, I asked my association to help. After four stressful weeks and a strong collaborative effort between CEA, the new commissioner, and our military commanding officers, a resolution was reached. The JROTC officers will be issued unique, appropriate certificates that will allow us to teach the JROTC program as it is designed by the Department of Defense, continue to grant credit to our students, and allow us to remain active members of the Teacher Retirement System.

I believe this situation would not have occurred if certification was handled by an independent standards board composed of practicing educators. Such a board would have recognized long ago that the 098 and 110 certificates are not appropriate for JROTC instructors, and would have sought a resolution by *working with* those most involved. In short, practicing educators would have known that the resolution would have had to protect how the JROTC program is taught, and the military instructors who teach it.

I hope you'll seriously consider the appropriateness of practicing educators having a stronger voice in governing our profession as you discuss the feasibility of establishing an educator standards board in CT.