

Testimony of Kim Scott
New Jersey Assembly Labor Committee
On A-3664
February 14, 2019

Good morning, my name is Kim Scott and I am an Educational Support Professional in the East Orange School District. I am here today to urge you to pass Assembly bill A-3664, which would extend to non-teaching employees of local, county or regional school districts, boards or commissions the right to submit to binding arbitration any dispute regarding whether there is just cause for a disciplinary action.

Simply stated: this legislation would extend due process rights to Educational Support Professionals who do not currently have such protections.

For me, as an Educational Support Professional who's dedicated my life's work of helping children grow, this bill is about respect, fairness and worth.

I've never worried too much about titles in education. To me, everyone who works in a school is an educator because it takes an entire team of dedicated professionals to make a school work.

ESP's play an intricate part in the learning process, we support the school, the teacher, the student and most often the community. We are truly essential school professionals.

Despite that, most ESP's don't have adequate due process rights under the law. Like our teacher colleagues, we deserve those rights and protections, because we all work together to ensure that our schools provide a great education to our students.

We are worth respect. We are worth fair treatment. Speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of ESP's across this state, this bill would enable us to hold our heads high because it would mean the New Jersey Legislature recognizes our right to fair treatment.

Educational Support Professionals are part of the reason that New Jersey's public school consistently rank top in the nation.

We are dedicated to our schools. Many of us earn far less than our teacher colleagues, even though we regularly go above and beyond to make sure our students are safe, healthy, well fed and equipped to succeed.

Most ESP's live in the communities where they work. We are familiar faces beyond school. We see the children at the grocery store, at church and sporting events.

We *know* our students on a personal level because it's our job to support them.

School districts have the right to take appropriate disciplinary actions, but those actions should be warranted. This bill wouldn't change that. However, all school employees should have an opportunity to make their case before a neutral party. This is an important safeguard against arbitrary, unfair or politically motivated mistreatment of those employees.

More importantly, due process will allow us to flourish professionally. It will provide us with a sense of stability and the opportunity to focus fully and the wellbeing of our students.

A-3664 brings greater equity and fairness to the handling of school employee disciplinary matters. Due process is fundamental to our constitutional democracy in America. I urge you to support this bill.

Please vote yes today, and again, thank you for your time.