



California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THOSE CONCERNED WITH TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE OR DIALECT AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Hon. Darrell Steinberg, Chair
Senate Rules Committee
State Capitol, Room 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Steinberg:

The California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) must respectfully oppose the nomination of Rae Belisle as a member of the California State Board of Education. CATESOL's members teach English as a second language (ESL) in K-12, adult education and higher education institutions. The organization works to improve the professional development for ESL teachers and to ensure that EL students receive the highest quality public education. It is in this capacity that we must urge the Senate to oppose the nomination of Ms. Belisle.

Ms. Belisle has a long history of state service which has included work in the state legislature, the State Board of Education and the Sacramento County Office of Education. However, it is her role as Chief Counsel and Executive Director to the State Board of Education over a period of seven years from 1997 to 2004 that gives CATESOL its greatest concern.

Her track record on policies related to English learners has been to consistently support a "one size fits all" approach. This is particularly true in the area of textbook adoptions, statewide testing policies, and professional development for teachers and administrators. As a result, textbooks have failed to meet the needs of the majority of English learners. Additionally, professional development related to these standards-aligned texts has been inadequately focused on the specific needs of EL students. As a result of the policies supported by Ms. Belisle, EL students and teachers with large numbers of EL students have been denied access to the most appropriate and effective instruction and curriculum.

Additionally, Ms. Belisle has consistently supported the promulgation of Title V Administrative Regulations that undermined the rights of parents to choose the best education for their children and restrict the rights they have at the local level. During her tenure as the SBE Legal Counsel, Title V Regulations on the "waiver provision" of Prop 227 were issued. Her legal advice resulted in litigation and a policy reversal by legislature pertaining to Reading First regulations that prohibited bilingual classrooms or schools with one or more bilingual classrooms from eligibility for receiving Reading First funds. In the view of CATESOL, this narrow view of the law resulted in countless parents of EL students being denied a greater number of educational options for their children.

Again, while we appreciate Ms. Belisle's support for public education and her years of public service, we must oppose her appointment to a four-year term on the State Board of Education due to her past track record, which has not advanced the status of English Learners in California. Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns over this important appointment.

Sincerely,

Belinda Braunstein
President, CATESOL