

Public Hearing Testimony

NOT speaking!
Speaker: Margaret
Hackett

Date: 3/12/07 Bill Number: 7351

Margaret H. Hackett
Chair, Manchester Board of Education
H.B. Bill 7351, An Act Concerning Textbook Loans

Monday, March 12, 2007

I wish to express my opposition to H.B. No. 7351, an Act Concerning Textbook Loans.

As you may be aware, Manchester is one of just a few towns in Connecticut that has designed a textbook loan program for Manchester students. Manchester is the home of eight nonpublic schools, in which 1,772 students are enrolled, with 755 of these students residing in Manchester.

Designing and developing this program was not so simple and involved a host of complex issues. There were many philosophical discussions about separation of church and state, use of taxpayer resources to support nonpublic education, and whether such a program is simply a softer and gentler form of school vouchers. However, our lengthy discussions proved fruitful and board members designed a program that supports our constituents - Manchester families and students.

Coincidentally, the Manchester Board of Education is scheduled to adopt the textbook loan program at its meeting this evening. Throughout the program design process, we assured the citizens of Manchester that we would proceed carefully and thoughtfully. After four months of effort in designing the program, our board delivered a final product that we're fairly comfortable with. However, in light of Bill 7351, the board may consider postponing its vote so that we have a complete understanding of the impact this bill will have on our textbook loan program.

As section 10-228a of the Connecticut General Statutes indicates, textbook loan programs are discretionary. Ironically, though, Bill 7351 imposes sweeping language and impractical requirements for those school boards offering a textbook loan program. It is my opinion that legislators should not support the bill for two reasons:

First, this bill is extremely generous in nature, and would result in expanding the scope of Manchester's loan program by requiring us to offer textbook loans to students who do not reside in Manchester. I believe the objective of the current law, which is for school boards to have the ability to assist resident families and students, is quite sound and reasonable. However, extending textbook loans to nonresidents, (in Manchester's case, over 1,000 nonresident students), especially without expressed financial need, or income qualification procedures, similar to what a nonpublic school requires of a parent applying for tuition assistance, is an unfair and unnecessary requirement for taxpayers and school boards.

Secondly, section 10-228a requires that the textbooks loaned to nonpublic school students are currently in use within the public school system, which gives a public school the opportunity to leverage loaned textbooks back into a public school classroom once the

nonpublic school student is done using the textbook. Bill 7351 removes the “currently in use” clause and requires that school boards loan any nonreligious textbooks available from a book vendor, whether or not the public school system uses the textbook. Should this bill pass, I anticipate Manchester Public Schools receiving literally hundreds of textbook loan requests, relegating us to a library and a warehouse for books that we will likely never use or have a purpose for, which is an administrative imposition to school districts, and a burden to taxpayers.

I feel that the provisions in 10-228a are sufficient, and more importantly, effectively balance the needs of nonpublic school students, public school systems, and taxpayers.

Please feel free to contact me at 860-647-0508 or peg_hackett@cox.net if you have any questions.