

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: Kendall F.

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Testimony of
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Concerning Raised Bill No. 7354
AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND
VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION FOR CONNECTICUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND INTERNET
SAFETY

March 12, 2007

I am currently serving as the Chairman of the Commission for Educational Technology and in that capacity I am here today to speak in support of HB 7354.

The Commission supports a virtual learning environment for PK-12 public schools, which makes available online courses and other learning experiences for students.

A statewide system where students can access online courses would address several of Connecticut's educational issues by:

- Providing greater equity in educational opportunities: regardless of where a student lives in CT, s/he could access the same courses.
- Assisting with the teacher shortage issue - teachers would be available online, can be drawn from distant parts of the state, country, or the world.
- Allowing for increased and broader offerings in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, both at basic and advanced levels that each school might not have the staffing or numbers of students to support in-house. Could also include online language instruction, such as Mandarin Chinese.
- Providing another style of learning to students, one in which some who have been previously unsuccessful in traditional learning environments may excel. Providing an opportunity for students to gain experience learning in an online environment - a skill they will most likely need for success in higher education and/or the workforce.

To that end the Commission voted at its January meeting to support the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium's efforts to expand virtual learning opportunities for K-12 in partnership with the State Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education. The Commission recognizes that there are many ways to accomplish this and I think the proposed language provides the Commission with needed flexibility. We also feel that there is no need to recreate the wheel and that using the existing infrastructure for providing online courses makes sense. While expanding the Commission's charge to include virtual learning is welcome, so too is the proposed funding since the Commission has no funds for its own operations let alone initiatives such as creating and delivering virtual learning.

Section 2 of the bill mandates that each local or regional board of education require that any school under its jurisdiction with grade three, four or five provide instruction on the safe use of the Internet to students in such grades. I was unclear as to who was going to monitor compliance and whether any thought had been given to establishing standards for such instruction. This hasn't been discussed at the Commission so I don't have a position on it other than my own personal belief that such instruction is important.

The Commission stands ready to work with the Committee as this bill moves forward.