

**TESTIMONY OF ANDREA COMER  
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 7359  
AN ACT CONCERNING A GRANT PROGRAM TO COMBAT TRUANCY**

**March 12, 2007**

My name is Andrea Comer, and I am an elected member of the Hartford Board of Education. I ran for the school board for one reason: I realize that education is the key to a promising future for children, regardless of where they live, how much money comes into their house, and who's providing their care.

As a member of the Hartford school board, I am also Chair of the Safety & Order Task Force, which was formed to review systems that impact the safety of our students. The district is in the process of revamping its suspension policy to prevent students from being absent from school and thereby absent from their education. Our attempts to address suspensions have highlighted the issue of truancy, because we've found that students who are suspended repeatedly ultimately disconnect from school. Students who become chronically truant usually drop out, and with their educational potential unfulfilled, they find their options limited in terms of earning a living – or living a life.

Our Police Chief, Daryl K. Roberts has developed a truancy prevention initiative, providing considerable personnel resources to identify truant youth and get them re-engaged in school. The Chief and his officers realize there are often a host of issues that contribute to a student's truancy, but without a coordinated, comprehensive strategy that connects law enforcement with the school district and desperately needed social services, simply returning the child to school is a temporary remedy.

I support Bill No. 7359 because it will target those school districts that need it the most, as determined by dropout rates. Our Superintendent, Dr. Steven Adamowski, recently reported that Hartford's current graduation rate is 29 percent. It should come as no surprise that most of the remaining 71 percent have truancy as a common denominator in their ultimate separation from school. Further, by pushing districts to use methods that have demonstrated results, methods that include reading instruction, we are doing more than treating the outcome; we're addressing a root cause. Many states determine their future incarceration rates based on their third-grade literacy levels, and Connecticut follows that path. More minority children in Connecticut can't read on grade level by third grade, and minorities make up the bulk of the criminal justice system.

The bill also deserves support because it includes one of our most needed and valuable resources: parents. Of the 80 cases the Hartford Police Department has regarding truancy, elementary school students make up about one-third. For one reason or another, these parents are literally sentencing their children to a future filled with challenges and obstacles. This bill would provide the early intervention needed to reverse that direction.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that the bill require the collection and independent evaluation of data resulting from these truancy programs. Too often we launch initiatives and either

fail to evaluate them or even document them in a meaningful way. We need to real about what works – and what doesn't – if we're to truly address this issue.

Our children are all in a race, but as we know they don't all begin from the same starting point. This is one way we can at least give them a better shot at reaching the finish line.

I thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrea Comer".

Andrea Comer  
Hartford Board of Education