

Testimony provided for

S. B. No. 1061 AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE CENTER FUNDING

By

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Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Milton Natusch, and I serve as Chairperson of the Coventry Board of Education. I am speaking in support of S.B. 1061, An Act concerning Vocational Agriculture Center Funding. This Regional-based School Choice Program was created by the State Board of Education and State Legislature in the mid-1950's as a program to support students who wanted to pursue a career in the field of agriculture and related occupations. Coventry is a small school district which consistently sends approximately 25 students each year to the E. O. Smith Agriculture Program in Storrs. The financial obligation to the community is large, but well worth it for the young people who want to learn about and work in the industry of agriculture. The tuition Coventry pays is fixed by state law at \$7,069 for each student we send. Increasing the amount of reimbursement to the operating centers, such as E.O. Smith, is long over due. The impact of this additional funding would not only assist operating centers with increased revenue to off-set program costs, but the potential of having a sending schools per student tuition rate lowered by the operating Board of Education could become a reality. Coventry also sends students to Windham and CheneyTech operated by the State, and to Great Paths Academy, at Manchester Community College. We pay no tuition to the first two and a little over \$3000 per student for Great Paths and the state picks up the rest of the tuition. The inequity of how programs are funded by the state needs to be addressed by the legislature and is long over due!

There is strong evidence through State Department of Education Reports, that graduates of vocational agriculture programs, and specific indicators from Coventry students who have attended and graduated from the E. O. Smith program, that they are better prepared academically, their leadership through the FFA is outstanding, many go on to postsecondary institutions, they are being employed in the field they are trained for and the transferability of skills to other occupations is extremely high. This State funded program is a tremendous asset to the economic well-being of Connecticut.

These attributes are consistent with the No Child Left Behind Act – students who attend such programs are **not** being left behind they are the ones moving forward. The State cannot afford to leave this program BEHIND!

Thank you for your consideration.