



Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:  
Sharon Palmer  
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Testimony  
Education Committee  
March 12, 2007  
Sharon M. Palmer

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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President AFT Connecticut, a 26,000 member AFL-CIO union.

Today you are hearing RB 1405 which contains language to establish an urban initiative we believe holds great promise for improving urban schools. The urban initiative is a unique, collaborative partnership among education stakeholders. Through UConn's Neag School of Education unprecedented field based assistance will be available to urban schools. The direct connection with UConn's School of Education will insure research based best practices can be provided to school districts in a collaborative way. We believe this is the only initiative to date which partners public school superintendents, school administrators and teacher unions. We are all strongly committed to the initiative.

This program is designed to make systemic change in school districts. It is not another grant for a year or two to try something "new". It is to bring accepted best practices to the unique needs of urban districts. That means addressing the complexity of the challenges facing urban districts by establishing a school climate conducive of learning; supporting intensive mentoring and professional development for staff; developing a school program around a

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schedule which incorporates time for team work, collaboration, and a solid standards based curriculum as well as imbedding a comprehensive parent involvement component.

We would prefer the initiative be administered by UConn's School of Education rather than the Department of Education. The direct connection between higher education and school districts is essential to making systemic change. It is logical that the unique capacity of UConn to deliver assistance to urban districts should mean UConn manages grants, and provides planning, development and funding. We believe it is critical this be an "on the ground" operation to achieve real progress.

Raised bill 1408 gives significant advantage to charter schools. The Department of Education will develop an accountability system for charters in consultation with charters. We applaud the undertaking but believe all stakeholders should be included.

The use of state-wide net current expenditure per pupil funding guarantees the charter school more money than the current host district. The same concept is applied for special education costs.

The bill allows for expansion of existing charters to new sites and requires host districts to provide transportation to out of district sites. This is skirting the cap which was placed on charters for good reason. If Amistad establishes four new branch sites in other parts of the state, New Haven Public Schools will have to provide transportation.

I really don't know where to begin with RB 7345. As one who served on the accountability subcommittee of the governor's Commission, I never dreamed it would translate into such punitive language. The help provided by the Department of Education includes: assign a technical assistance team, intensified supervision and direction, provide a consultant team, assist with development of a plan and review curricula, to mention a few.

I ask you to compare the assistance in 7345 with the urban initiative assistance set out in RB 1405. You should ask which is more likely to produce systemic change and make a real difference in the education of children. Accountability without the companion piece of meaningful assistance and resources will not accomplish its intended purposes. We urge you to support RB 1405 for real change.

Thank you.