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Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:  
Sen. Donald Williams  
Bill Number: 1405

Date:  
3/12/07

### Testimony of

Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.  
Senate President Pro Tempore

on

### SB1405 AAC Intervention Model for Schools in Need of Improvement and Concerning Urban Education

#### Education Committee Public Hearing

March 12, 2007

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Development Committee, thank you for considering SB1405, AAC Intervention Model for Schools in Need of Improvement and Concerning Urban Education.

The Senate Democrats have proposed a package of bills to address opportunities for urban youth. SB1405 represents our proposal to promote structural reform in schools identified as in need of improvement pursuant to No Child Left Behind. In addition, the bill promotes the sharing of best practices in schools statewide. These goals are achieved by creating a center for collaborative education operated by the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. This center would operate as a partnership linking school practitioners to renowned educational experts to facilitate the transfer of researched-based educational innovation to classrooms. SB1405 also proposes innovative school reform models and institutes accountability measures that would provide options for restructuring schools identified as in need of improvement. SB1405 further establishes a program to increase the number of trained tutors and mentors available to urban students.

Collaborative Solutions for Schools - The center proposed in this bill would foster field-based collaboration between school personnel (teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators) and higher education professionals. The goal of the center

would be to make a significant difference where the rubber hits the road – the classroom. It would do this, in part, by facilitating the evaluation of new strategies and the spread of best practices. Best practices would be identified from research, experience in other states, and innovative strategies identified by Connecticut's traditional, charter and magnet schools. Importantly, a major goal of Connecticut's charter school legislation was to create laboratories for innovation that could be replicated system-wide. It has been 10 years since charter schools were first authorized and it is past time that the successful strategies they have utilized to raise achievement be identified and shared with schools around the state. The center would serve as a conduit of reform by ensuring that successful new approaches are shared with schools that could benefit from such innovation.

Specifically, the center will help schools:

- Reduce the achievement gap;
- Evaluate and implement best practices;
- Plan and implement systemic reforms, including the development of CommPACT schools – local schools organized by community members, parents, administrators, children, and teachers;
- Institute strategies that could enhance positive student behavior,
- Implement strategies to attract and retain more highly-qualified teachers, in part by improving upon Connecticut's BEST (Beginner Educator Support and Training program) teacher induction program; and
- Engage and involve parents in school activities and school-level decisions.

Most importantly, the center will continually evaluate the outcomes of its innovative practices, improve strategies based on such evaluations, and make available what is learned to other schools and districts across the state.

*Innovative Community-based Schools* – SB1405 also establishes a grant program that would provide start-up funds for a new type of public school – a *CommPACT school* – authorized by local school boards and organized by local governing councils consisting of community representatives, parents, administrators, children and parents. Our proposal would provide seed grants to CommPACT schools, which are modeled on a Boston-based school reform strategy that has been shown to dramatically increase student achievement by enabling those closest to the students to have a greater share in the decision making process. The CommPACT school model fosters structural reform while embracing union participation; it creates a more productive and collaborative environment for school professionals, parents, and kids alike.

*Teacher Mentoring Initiative* – Our urban education initiative also addresses high-teacher turnover in our urban schools. Passage of SB1405 would help to increase

teacher quality and retention and enhance the BEST program by connecting new urban teachers to innovative mentoring strategies. Also, these strategies would be monitored by the center at UCONN, which would assist districts in evaluating the program's outcomes. The proven, innovative teacher-retention strategies could then be transferred to schools throughout Connecticut.

Trained Volunteer Tutors and Mentors for Youth - A key ingredient to preparing youth for an enriching future is the presence of role models who can help them define paths toward achieving their goals. A proposal in SB1405, and a related proposal in SB1352, AAC Youth Opportunities and Urban Revitalization, seek to increase the number of such role models available to urban youth in two ways:

1. Teach-One Tutoring - SB1405 proposes to also tap into college work-study and service-learning programs to train university students as tutors and connect them to community programs servicing youth. It would also draw volunteers from the business community and engage and train more retired professionals to serve as tutors and mentors; and
2. Public Service Mentors - SB1352 proposes a way to increase the number of trained volunteers by providing paid leave to state and municipal employees to serve as mentors and tutors. Our plan would match municipal costs.

Taken together, these proposals to recruit and train tutors and mentors could vastly increase the number of volunteers available to help youth do better in school and become more productive citizens in their communities.

Accountability - SB1405 increases school accountability by requiring elementary and middle schools in need of improvement to restructure in a way consistent with certain reform models that have been proven to be successful elsewhere.

Our proposals, SB1405, SB1352 AAC Youth Opportunities and Urban Revitalization, and SB709, AA Establishing a Community Violence Prevention Outreach Competitive Grant Program, represent a comprehensive array of approaches to improve opportunities available to urban youth and to narrow the achievement gap. Thank you for your consideration.