

# TESTIMONY

Education Committee

February 20, 2007

**Sharon M. Palmer**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for providing this hearing opportunity.

I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a 26,000 member AFL-CIO union.

I am here to speak primarily on Bill 1114, AAC the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education. The bill as you know the bill is 79 pages and contains much detail. At first blush and even after some review, our initial reaction has been "What's not to like!".

Our union has been advocating for 50-50 funding for at least 20 years. You now have a serious proposal before you for consideration. We ask you to get this work done. It has been a long time coming. Our towns and cities have waited long enough and many have been plagued with multiple budget referendums. We urge your support of the goals set out in the bill.

There are some kinks which need to be worked out and we would like you to talk about some areas we believe need attention.

We are particularly pleased to see support for grants and loan forgiveness for students pursuing degrees in education and more specifically, early childhood education. We hope you support this initiative.

Section 15 of the bill is about accountability measures. While we agree with most of the process we do not agree with Section 15(d). The Commissioner should not be in the

business of reconstituting schools or replacing school leadership. If fundamental change is to occur, we believe that the school district has to make those difficult decisions.

Section 19(b) requires passing a high school exit exam for graduation. We do not believe there has been enough discussion or research on such tests in other states to warrant passage of this section. We would recommend holding regional hearings and completing an in-depth study before action would be taken. Quite frankly, the thought of more high stakes testing is not appealing.

We note that priority school grants end in 2011. We ask you to be particularly mindful of that as you work through the intricacies of the funding formula changes. We know the intentions are good but sometimes issues get lost unintentionally.

Let me just mention that we support RB7135 which raises and indexes the foundation grant. We also support the increase in special education reimbursements as set out in RB7176.

You have your work cut out for you this year. If we can help in any way, please let us know.

Thank you.

