



Connecticut **Business & Industry** Association

**Testimony of
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Before the
Education Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut
February 20, 2007**

Good Afternoon. My name is Lauren Weisberg Kaufman and I am a Vice President with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) and Executive Director of the CBIA Education Foundation. CBIA represents approximately 10,000 companies across the state of Connecticut, ranging from large corporations to small businesses in virtually every industry.

I am here today to testify on aspects of **Bill No. 1114, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education.** My remarks will be focused on those sections of the bill that relate directly to items that have been discussed and approved by CBIA's Board of Directors in prior discussions on education reform. As we are currently in a process of obtaining feedback from our members and our Board on the budget proposed by Governor Rell and have not yet completed that process, I will not be addressing all aspects of this bill today. As we assess the views of our members over the next several weeks we will formulate more specific responses to the Governor's proposed budget regarding education reform and tax policy.

Having said that, there are some specific recommendations that I would like to address today:

Section 11 addresses the role of the State Department of Education in establishing a grant program to support "interdistrict magnet school programs." CBIA believes these programs have a proven track record of engaging students in exciting educational experiences that raise academic performance and promote innovative learning, especially benefiting urban, low-income, minority youth. Efforts to learn from these models should be accelerated and quality magnet programs serving a greater number of youth should be expanded.

Section 15 strengthens the statewide accountability measures to conform to the requirements of the No Child Left behind Act, P.L. 107-110. CBIA supports the measures in the proposed legislation and strategies to assist school districts, individual schools and educators to more effectively meet the educational needs of their students.

We continue to be concerned, however, with the language in the last sentence of section (c) that suggests that a solution to poor performance is to "...reassign teachers and principals to different schools." If an administrator or teacher is not performing well, reassigning them often merely shifts the problem to another school and does not address the underlying causes of the problem. This is not accountability and does nothing to raise the performance of students in the reassigned school. It is not a defensible practice and should no longer be accepted or bargained.

Section 16 allows the Commissioner of Education to "... establish and administer a preschool subsidy program to increase the availability, affordability and quality of preschool services." CBIA supports expansion of these programs, in particular for at-risk 3 and 4 year olds. If we can do more to level the playing field for these youth before they enter kindergarten, they will be much better prepared to achieve mastery of a rigorous curriculum as they proceed through the grades.

Section 18 provides language for new high school graduation requirements. I particularly want to address those that would commence with classes graduating in 2011, as we believe that they should go further than specified in this bill. In particular, CBIA is proposing that Connecticut adopt:

A RIGOROUS, RELEVANT HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM THAT INCLUDES AT LEAST 20 CREDITS AND/OR DEMONSTRATES PROFICIENCY IN THE FOLLOWING:

- Four years of English
- Four years of Mathematics, including Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II (or equivalent integrated mathematics curriculum)
- Three years of Laboratory Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) (or equivalent integrated science curriculum)
- Three and one half years of Social Studies (chosen from a year of US History, a year of World History, a year of World Geography, half a year of Economics, and half a year of Government/Civics)
- Two years of World Language (two credits of the same language)
- Technology/Computer Literacy (1 credit)
- Four years of Physical Education/School Sports/Health and Wellness (1 credit)
- Electives in the Arts, Global Awareness, Citizenship/Ethics and Personal Finance (1.5 credits)

The academic requirements specified in the first five bullets have been put into statute by a number of states throughout the country, through the American Diploma Project and the State Scholars Initiative. State Scholars, which CBIA, along with the State Departments of Education and Higher Education, introduced into Connecticut, is cited as one of the accepted curriculums, along with AP and IB courses, for the American Competitiveness

Grants program, which provides additional Pell grant funds to students who complete this rigorous curriculum. CBIA has been working with schools in New Haven and Danbury over the last two years to implement this program and have been pleased that many students are now taking and succeeding in a more rigorous curriculum. We believe this curriculum can be mastered by most, if not all, students and have seen in schools throughout the country that if standards are set high and strategies are in place to help students meet them, American students, just like their counterparts throughout the world, rise to the challenge and leave high school far better prepared for post-secondary education and employment.

We believe that it is not sufficient to specify in Connecticut's graduation requirements merely a number of years, especially in math and science, and urge the state to strongly consider language that requires algebra, geometry and lab sciences, as states such as Michigan, Oklahoma and others have done.

Section 19 specifies that "...for classes graduating in 2010, and for each graduating class thereafter, a student shall achieve a level or proficiency or higher on each component of the tenth grade mastery exam...in order to graduate or receive a diploma." CBIA supports this recommendation and believes that it would give both employers and post-secondary institutions a greater sense of confidence that the graduates that enter their doors will have the requisite skills for college level work and employment. It would also mean that the 50-80% of freshman in many of the state's colleges, would not be taking at least one developmental course as so many are required to do today.

CBIA supports the concepts raised in **Sections 20, 21 and 22** to offer full day kindergarten, keep a close eye on truancy and require school districts to closely monitor and develop plans to get all students reading on grade level from first grade through fourth grade. All these measures will help ensure that students do not fall behind at an early age and join the dismal school drop-out statistics we see at ninth grade in our urban districts.

CBIA will continue to support education reforms that are cost-effective, fiscally prudent and sustainable and will result in improved student performance. We must continue to focus on proven strategies that will close the achievement gap and raise standards for all students.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

