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TESTIMONY
Education Committee
February 28, 2007

John Altieri

SB 1114

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

I am John Altieri, a Vice President of AFT Connecticut and Chair of our Union's Pre-K through 12 Issues Council,

I am here today on behalf of our 26,000 member union to testify in favor of S.B. 1114 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION.

Our union has been advocating for 50-50 funding for at least 20 years - since the passage of the Education Enhancement legislation. We have long supported raising the foundation grant for school districts and putting an index in place as well as increasing the foundation level for students. Additionally, we have advocated for the elimination of the cap on towns. We respectfully urge you to take this opportunity to work from the Governor's budget proposal. Finally, there seems to be a very real opportunity to reach this goal in a bipartisan way - an opportunity that has not often come along. Our towns and cities have waited long enough and many have been plagued with multiple budget referendums due to funding shortfalls. We urge your support of the goals set out in the bill.



There are some kinks which need to be worked out and we hope to work with you in the coming weeks and months to resolve these issues.

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

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.

Let us be clear, we are not opposed to charter schools.. We believe that all schools should be adequately funded, including charter school – there should be no winners or losers! We are heartened by the fact that while there is increased funding for the existing charter schools, there are no new charter schools proposed in the Governor’s budget. We strongly believe that the schools we already have should be fairly funded. Further, before adding new charter schools, there must be real analysis of their funding, operation and performance that includes the true per pupil expenditure. We strongly believe that opportunity, access, resources and accountability must be consistently applied to all schools – traditional and non. The same holds true for magnets.

We should also increase special education reimbursements to the extent possible.

Lastly, let me put in a “plug” for universal health care. We need healthy children, families and communities for us to have a better chance at success with the children. The time is now for health care as well!

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

Thank you.