



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



STATEMENT OF ALLAN B. TAYLOR, ON BEHALF OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, IN OPPOSITION TO S.B. 1354

Chairman Gaffey, Chairman Fleischmann, and members of the Committee:

I am Allan B. Taylor, the chair of the State Board of Education. At our meeting on March 7, the Board voted unanimously to oppose SB 1354 and directed me, as chair, to present its views to the Committee. I thank you for this opportunity to be heard.

Section 1 of S.B. 1354 requires that the Chair of the State Board hold a degree in education. Our discussion of that provision was led by Board members with education degrees. As they explained, there is no reason for a requirement that the Chair of the Board hold an education degree because the Board, like this committee, is a policy-making body. While knowledge of our educational system and its strengths and weaknesses is obviously important to the Board's work, that work consists of policy-making, not of sitting as a professional review panel for the Department of Education. The knowledge needed to perform the Board's role can be obtained by undergraduate or graduate work in education and a career in that field, but it can also be obtained by participating in other levels of education governance, by acting as an advocate, by study from the perspective of other academic disciplines, by experience as a business person, or in other ways. Members from all of these backgrounds have been, are, and will be fully contributing members of the Board.

The skills required of a Board Chair are not necessarily part of the training or experience of an educator. The Chair is the principal spokesperson for the Board and is often asked to speak to stakeholder groups and the press. The Chair not only presides at meetings, but also facilitates discussion and decision by helping Board members find the common ground in their views. The Chair serves both the Board and the Department by helping to communicate and explain the Board's concerns to the Department and the Department's concerns to the Board.

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:

Allan Taylor

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subject to partisan politics. We have for decades believed that education, which generates its own full measure of controversies because it deals with the people who are most important to all of us, our children, should not be burdened with the extraneous controversies of the political system. And that insulation has worked. Toward the end of the Rowland Administration, when the administrative arm of the State government was mired in controversy and scandal, the Board appointed Betty Sternberg as Commissioner. That appointment occurred without any consideration of politics, and without any suggestion that the appointment had any basis other than the Board's perception of the candidates' merits. Few if any other significant appointments at that troubled time were equally free of partisan suspicion. The Commissioner's moral authority, a necessary attribute if the Commissioner is to carry out the legislature's charge to lead change, would be reduced were that insulation not preserved.

We fear another adverse consequence of the proposed change. As you know, we recently named Dr. Mark McQuillan as our next Commissioner. Dr. McQuillan happens to be the first Commissioner from outside Connecticut since Mark Shedd was appointed in 1973. Dr. McQuillan was our unanimous choice from among a relatively small number of applicants from Connecticut and other States. Although our applicant pool was of high quality, its small size reflects both the extremely competitive market for chief state school officers and the equally competitive, and frequently higher paying, market for superintendents in Connecticut and elsewhere. We fear that adding steps to the selection process, and especially adding steps that raise the concern that extraneous political considerations will affect the process, will make the next search for a Commissioner for Connecticut even less attractive in the national marketplace.

We also fear that a change in the appointment process after over a century and a half, following immediately upon the appointment of someone from outside the State, will send the message that while Connecticut's next search may be national, only local candidates need apply. While the next Commissioner may well come from within the Department or elsewhere in the State – and we have had many outstanding Commissioners who have – we feel strongly that the Board that will run that search on

behalf of the children of Connecticut should have the widest choice from among the best candidates the country has to offer.

Finally, let me pledge to you, on behalf of Dr. McQuillan, interim Commissioner Coleman, and the Board, that everyone at the Board and the Department is always available to consult with and be advised by you. We are eager to hear your views, and to offer you whatever counsel we can provide, in formal proceedings such as this, one on one, or in any other format and at any time and place any of you desires. You do not need to change a structure that has served Connecticut well for so long in order to assure that your voices are heard. We understand and fully respect your role as the leading makers of educational policy in the State of Connecticut, and we are at your service.