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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee. My name is Andrew Schneider, Executive Director of the ACLU of Connecticut, and I am here before you today to express our view that House Bill 5594, An Act Concerning a Corporate Tax Credit and an Income Tax Credit For Donations to Education Foundations, would have the effect of funneling public money to religious institutions in violation of the First Amendment. Therefore, we urge defeat of this bill.

Although well intended, this program would overwhelmingly benefit parochial schools, and thus have the effect of providing taxpayer money for the promotion of religion. Donors who received tax credits would essentially be compensated by the state for sponsoring religious education.

James Madison, the author of the First Amendment firmly believed that religion would flourish more freely without the aid of government because the power of government to aid religion necessarily implied the power of government to suppress religion. If there was any single practice the Framers of the Constitution meant to prohibit when they passed the First Amendment in 1791, it was forcing people to support other people's religion through compulsory taxation. Thomas Jefferson called this practice "sinful and tyrannical," and Madison also denounced it. Public funds raised through taxation could not be used to support religious schools.

Certainly, there have been breaches in the wall of separation between church and state because some religious believers have succeeded in their efforts to harness the power of the state to assist them. However, whenever they do, religious liberty for everyone else is diminished. The ACLU of Connecticut therefore urges you to keep this freedom intact in Connecticut by rejecting this bill

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: <sup>Andrew</sup>schneider

Date: 2/29/08 Bill Number: 5594