

Bill 5869
Testimony
Kathleen Carey

I am here to speak in favor of Bill 5869 in order to increase funding for vocational agriculture (Agriscience) programs throughout Connecticut. I am a senior at Nonnewaug High School and have been a member of the Woodbury FFA and student in the Ellis Clark Regional Agri-Science and Technology Program for 4 years. This year I am taking the Horse Management class in addition to three Advanced Placement classes. I am currently ranked 8th in our graduating class of 220. I have been accepted into the honors programs at the state universities of Connecticut, New Hampshire and Vermont, and each has offered me scholarships. I am also waiting on the decision from two private universities, College of the Holy Cross and Colgate University. I will be pursuing pre-veterinary studies wherever I decide to go in the fall and my goal is to be a licensed large animal veterinarian.

Back when I was a freshman, I applied to Vo-Ag thinking, "Well, I'll be lucky if I get in because then I can play with animals and go outside during school". What I didn't know then, is that Vo-Ag offers so much more than those simple pleasures. This program has become an integral part of my life. By bringing people together who have the same interests and values it has given me friends for life. There is a general reprieve from the stresses associated with the impersonal classes in the main building as soon as one walks into the Vo-Ag building. Would you believe that people stop swearing when they cross that threshold? Such mannerisms as civil language in front of elders are still valuable there even if no one cares about them elsewhere. Because of these things, when I get any free time I immediately make my way to the Vo-Ag building because I honestly want to be there more than anywhere else. I have asked myself what my life would have been like had I not been in Vo-Ag. Besides my best friends and a sound knowledge of equine management plus a dabbling knowledge of just about every other subject, I would have lost the better part of my resume and everything that those bullets represent: the leadership skills, the real life experience and common sense that, for some reason,

I had to be taught. Most importantly, I think, I would be missing the most crucial aspect of my life, its focus, and this rings true for every student. Without direction nothing I have done as far as academics or my involvement with horses – and that is just about all I have done – would have a shape or purpose for me. I have been introduced to countless possibilities and beyond that, I have been given the opportunity to try things out myself and judge, as only one with first hand experience can, whether they are right for me and what my position in society should be. Last summer I went to the United States Coast Guard Academy for the Academy Introduction Mission. I can almost guarantee that no one has come closer to boot camp than that. Now I wouldn't trade the experience for the world but after all was said and done, I received what is called a "Letter of Assurance" saying that, should I apply, I would be accepted in the class of 2012. This institution has an acceptance rate of about 10%. I was appropriately awed by such an honor but there was no question in my mind that I would not go. The truth of the matter was that I had been pursuing my dreams right in my hometown high school and the program I was involved in there was giving me the most solid base for my chosen profession that I could have asked for. The Coast Guard Academy simply doesn't offer a pre-veterinary major.

Now you have heard how this program has made all the difference to me but any graduate is evidence of its power to alter the course of one's life. Often Vo-Ag is the reason that there will be one more well adjusted, responsible leader out there than there might have been. Students graduating from this program are a thousand times more prepared for the workforce because of the work study program (Supervised Agricultural Experience Program), hands on experience and the lessons taught by teachers who are intuitive and more capable of taking a vested interest in their life. The role of this program in the life of someone like me is huge. I can't tell you how thrilled I am to have the privilege of being here and letting you know how imperative this program is to the success of so many students. It absolutely defines who we are and who we will be. Please take this opportunity to increase the funding available for these programs so that more students may reap the benefits. Thank you for your time.