

**TESTIMONY OF ANDREA COMER, HARTFORD SCHOOL BOARD
MEMBER, IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 5926, AN ACT CONCERNING
FAMILIES WITH SERVICE NEEDS**

March 17, 2008

On any given day, 2,000 students are absent from the Hartford Public Schools – that's about 10 percent of our student population. People talk about bullying, peer pressure and behavioral problems as factors. But there are other issues as well.

When the Hartford Police Department started its truancy prevention initiative in 2006, I was admittedly shocked at the number of kindergartners, first- and second graders who had already racked up dozens of absences before their involvement in the program. The reasons were even more astounding. One first-grader had missed more than 25 days because he had no socks and shoes that were too small for his feet. The walk to school meant blisters and pain for this 6-year-old boy, not to mention the taunts from his peers. His mother couldn't afford to meet his basic needs, and his education was the resulting cost.

Another 7-year-old was absent from school because his brother was sick, and his mother couldn't afford the lost pay of missed work. Still another was truant because her guardian never signed the assignments the teacher sent home – not because she was unwilling, but because she couldn't read.

I support House Bill 5926 because it acknowledges the need to address truancy comprehensively. A pilot truancy reduction program would give the selected school districts support in dealing with not only truant children but also their families, who more often than not are a key factor in the child's absence from school.

This bill suggests a new take on a complex, longstanding challenge. Refusing to take this multifaceted approach to truancy would be putting a Band-Aid on a stab wound or a bullet hole. It just won't heal, and the results can be terminal.

The bottom line is this: Kids who aren't in school aren't learning. And if they aren't learning they're falling behind. And if they're falling behind, they're more likely to end up not graduating, unemployed or underemployed, or locked up. But the downward spiral starts early.

Success and endless possibilities are the dream of every child. Let's not defer the dreams of our neediest children, and leave them like raisins in the sun. Let's give them a chance to realize their dreams, because every child deserves at least that.

Thank you.