

TESTIMONY BY RONALD VAN WINKLE, DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY SERVICES, TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCERNING
RAISED BILL NO. 646 ON MARCH 11, 2008

Good afternoon my name is Ronald F. Van Winkle. I am an economist and Director of the Department of Community Services for the Town of West Hartford. I have been involved in the administration and implementation of the town's capital budget for more than twenty years. During that time we have put in place more than \$200 million in new and renovated construction projects, the majority of which were school construction projects receiving assistance from the State Legislature. Our process for the hiring of design professional and construction manager's requires that we advertise each project and receive the applicant's qualifications. We review those applications and an internal committee selects three to five professionals for interview. The interview is conducted sometimes by a staff committee for smaller projects such as a roof replacement and for larger projects the interview committee can be conducted by a group as large as a

dozen and may include principal, teachers, parents and students as well as administrative staff. This process insures that the best possible designer or construction manager is selected who best understands the project goals and can communicate and listen to the concerns of the staff and public. The committee prioritizes their selections and we request proposals from the top two receiving the highest scores. If there is not a significant difference between the proposed fees we will go with the committee's preferred professional. This has worked very well for the town and our project have always been delivered on time and on budget.

Public construction is a very difficult, complicated, hand-holding and often criticized process. The small errors seem to be fodder for sensational reporting. Delay is your greatest enemy and during the past two years with construction costs rising at double-digit rates a month's delay can mean increased bids or significant change orders. Construction works best when there is a team that works together with a common goal. More often than not

construction breaks down because that relationship breaks down.

To save money and to deliver our projects on time we need to select the best team possible. Minor differences in fees are meaningless to the ultimate cost of a project but design errors, conflicts between designer and manager or construction management errors can take a significant toll. Having the right team in place not the cheapest team is critical to the success of the project.

Any process that uses to phrase "best qualified and lowest cost" means lowest cost. It is difficult to defend "best qualified" if their competitor does not have some gapping hole in their resume. We try to select the firm who we believe will build to best team. If someone contests that decision it can result in delay and delay ruins schedules and budgets so we will choose to accept lowest bid not best qualified. It is important that in many instances those applicants may all be qualified. But there will be a project where we make the wrong lowest bid decision and the project is burdened

with problems. Please allow us to make the best decision for our communities. Allow us to bring our projects in on time and on budget.