



PH Testimony Date: 2/29/08
Bill # PHB 5593
Speaker: REP JIM SHAPIRO

State of Connecticut
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To: Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey, and Members of the Education Committee
From: Representative Jim Shapiro (D-144)
Date: February 29, 2008
Re: HB 5593 – An Act Concerning Early Reading Success Grants

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Gaffey, members of the Education Committee, I thank you for taking up HB 5593 – An Act Concerning Early Reading Success Grants. This issue is extremely important to me as a resident of a priority school district that has utilized Early Reading Success (ERS) grants to help our students who struggle with reading. Your desire to restore this funding is encouraging, and much appreciated in my community.

While I cannot speak to how the ERS program is utilized in other towns, in Stamford ERS money was used to fund twelve (12) reading coaches, one for each elementary school. Pursuant to the terms of the grant, these teachers spent fifty percent of their time instructing classroom teachers on how to teach reading and fifty percent actually coaching students who were having difficulty reading. While the test results of the struggling students may not have shown as much improvement as one would hope, the program has helped a great number of students in the most important function of elementary education.

Accordingly, now is an appropriate time to employ the phrase "*mend it, don't end it.*" If we feel the results from ERS grants are not strong enough, we must fix the program, not just cut the funding. The simple fact remains that these children still have to learn how to read. As this Committee has acknowledged, the need did not disappear just because the funding did.

Yet, while we are seeking restoration of the program, we are not asking for a blank check. We recognize that in this age of accountability our district has a responsibility to demonstrate results and commit to working with the state to achieve those results. Towards that end, we would be supportive of tightened state requirements that include without limitation: establishing tighter application and evaluation procedures, clarifying the job descriptions of reading coaches, developing and expanding the training for teachers and coaches, clarifying the role of the principal and district leadership in the ERS schools/districts, developing a data warehouse to

allow for increased accountability, and reporting the percentage of students in grades one to three, inclusive, who score at or above proficiency for their grade level based on measures established by the State Board of Education.

We have a deep and abiding willingness to join with the state to make this valuable program work. We hope the state stands ready to work with us.

Again, I thank the Chairmen and the Committee for raising this important bill.