Testimony – Education Committee

H B 5820

State Senator Don DeFronzo

March 10, 2008

Chairmen Gaffey ,Representative Fleischman and members of the Committee.

For the record, I am State Senator Don DeFronzo of the Sixth District.

At the outset I want to thank the Committee chairs for raising HB 5820, AA Concerning High School Credit Private School World Language Courses.

Throughout Connecticut in communities such as New Britain, Bridgeport, Derby, Stamford and Hartford there exists a privately run supplemental educational program for Polish American children known as the Polish Saturday School. Beyond Connecticut these programs are run in 27 other states.

The purpose of the Polish Saturday School, which is funded privately, is to promote and preserve the heritage, culture and language of Polish American young people now living in the United States. In New Britain over 600 children ages five to eighteen attend Saturday School each week. The dedication of the students, staff and parents is remarkable.

The bill before you will allow Connecticut to join four other states (California, New York, New Jersey and Michigan) in allowing public school students who participate in foreign language courses in private, not-for profit schools to obtain

credit for such courses, provided the student passes a standard examination approved by the Commissioner of Education.

In New York, for example, a student may earn credit by passing the State's second language proficiency assessment as determined by the State Board of Regents. Other states have established somewhat different proficiency standards, but the affect is the same.

A program such as this recognizes the initiative of the student by eliminating what amounts to be a duplication of effort resulting from the student taking both the high school language course and the Saturday School course. It will also allow students the flexibility to take other courses, more personally relevant courses or perhaps even to finish their overall course requirements early. High school class rooms can be attended by those students who really need language education, and not by those who are clearly already proficient in a second language, but required to be present, non-the-less.

Mr. Chairman, this proposal is a simple, common sense option that could allow high school students to get more out of their formal high school experience by granting the Commissioner the discretion to recognize this alternative means of obtaining a required foreign language proficiency.

Thank you for your interest.