

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and Members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for your time.

My name is Courtney Bourns, a resident of West Hartford. I have a professional office in Hartford and am a member of a faith-based community here.

I'm here to urge the Committee to support the State Department of Education's request for funds needed to grow the court-ordered programs mandated by the State's 2008 agreement with the plaintiffs in *Sheff v. O'Neill*. Magnet schools and the Choice program must be expanded beginning this year to meet the integration goals set under the agreement. It is important, in my view, to provide the funds to meet these goals because:

- They have been determined in light of and as a response to the Supreme Court's ruling that all students in Connecticut are constitutionally entitled to a fundamental right to education and a corresponding affirmative State obligation to implement and maintain that right. The State has acknowledged this obligation and helped set and has agreed to meet these goals. It has made a binding commitment to do so;
- Meeting them is the right thing to do for our children; and
- Meeting them is important to the well-being of the Capital region, educationally, economically, and socially --- reflecting several recent studies by CBIA and others re the quality of life for all of our residents in the years ahead.

It is clear, according to the Department of Education and the Sheff plaintiffs, that the integration goals that have been set cannot be achieved without the funding requested. The Governor's budget is not only unfair to children and families who would benefit under the terms of the agreement. It is unfair to suburban towns whose residents are being encouraged to participate voluntarily in the magnet school and choice programs.

Under the Governor's proposal the suburbs will be expected to pay for each child who attends a host magnet school in Hartford and each suburban district will be reimbursed for less than ¼ of what it costs to educate children who participate in their Choice program. Under the Sheff agreement with the State the cost of running the magnet schools and participating in Choice are the State's responsibility, not Hartford's or the suburbs'.

The Governor's budget would also:

- reduce the State's contribution for magnet school construction – reducing the growth of the needed new schools and unfairly

shifting responsibility to build them to local school districts, thereby deterring districts from building them;

- result in insufficient funding for transportation, resulting in long bus rides for participating children, thereby discouraging and undermining the two programs – both of which depend on transportation - and the integration goals established by the State and Sheff plaintiffs; and
- remove the “user friendly,” efficient and well-staffed Choice office now integrated with the Magnet school office and overseen by CREC from CREC, placing it instead with a new and untested entity that will undercut the program’s organizational efficiency and potential growth at a time when it needs to double or triple in size to meet the new goals. The CREC Project Choice Office has been doing a great job offering academic and social support and helping children make the transition required by their participation in the programs. That’s the way it should be.

And that’s why it is important to provide all of the additional funding requested by the State Department of Education for these programs.

Thank you.