

Testimony

Submitted to the

Education Committee

March 9, 2009

**GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION**

Good afternoon. We are Karen Vibert, Commissioner – Bristol Board of Education, Christopher Wilson, Commissioner – Bristol Board of Education and Dr. Phil Streifer, Superintendent of the Bristol Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. We would like to focus our comments on the Governor's Bill No. 830 and we speak specifically in support of its provisions concerning ECS aid, additional support for magnet school tuition, and suspension of mandates.

It is critical that the state increase its financial support for magnet school tuitions. Local school districts were not the defendant in the Sheff v. O'Neill desegregation case. And to date school districts have worked to help the State meet its obligations to maximize the numbers of students educated in desegregated environments. But the cost to do so is now severely impacting on local boards' ability to provide a reasonable education for all of their students. Therefore it is important that state funding for magnet tuitions be increased.

The Sheff Decision, in its implementation, is another mandate on local districts. Superintendents and Boards are not opposed to the Magnet School Program or Sheff; some, including ourselves, however are opposed to any unfunded, or partially funded mandate that impacts that 70% of their budget which is 'not mandated' and where reductions must be made. The State simply has to find a way to fully fund magnet school tuitions. Fiscal pressures are forcing districts to now take a different perspective on this issue – moving away from their role as willing participants due to the pressure magnet school tuitions are placing on the 'regular education' side of their budgets and programming.

We also speak in support of the Governor's proposal to level fund ECS aid. While we wish it could be increased to be consistent with its original legislative purpose, we recognize the severe fiscal constraints you are under. Level funding of ECS is absolutely critical to ensuring an adequate education for all children in the State.

We support suspending the 'in-school suspension' act as proposed by the Governor. However, we suspect that very few districts have actually budgeted for this next year. Many groups have advocated, as have we, for more broad-based suspension of various unfunded mandates. We urge you to take a closer look at this issue in the coming weeks as major savings can be realized by putting off other mandates as well for a couple years.

Commissioners Vibert and Wilson, and Superintendent Streifer – Statement to General Assembly's  
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All of these factors play into the quality of education that local boards of education can provide in the next few years. A large part of our budget is 'mandated' leaving local districts less room to cope with funding cuts or additional mandates such as growing magnet and Open Choice tuitions.

Unprecedented times require extra-ordinary action. We simply can't keep squeezing the 'non-mandated' side of education budgets; we need relief in the form of suspending various unfunded mandates controlled solely by the State.

Respectfully,

*Karen Vibert, Chris Wilson, Phil Streifer*

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