

Sheff Movement



Quality Integrated Education for All Children

**Testimony to the
Education Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
March 9, 2009**

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

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Philip Tegeler. I am a resident of West Hartford and am currently serving as the staff coordinator of the Sheff Movement coalition, a city and suburban coalition of parents, educators, and other stakeholders supporting the vitally important effort to fulfill the constitutional rights of Hartford schoolchildren to a quality, integrated education.

I am testifying today on Governor's Bill 830, An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education. I want to make it clear that this is not an official statement on behalf of the lawyers or plaintiffs in the Sheff v. O'Neill case – we understand that the plaintiffs may be submitting their own statement for the record.

On behalf of the coalition, we are deeply disappointed in this Bill. It jeopardizes hard-won gains just as we are making progress with the voluntary, two-way, regional system that is the backbone of the Sheff v. O'Neill remedy.

Let's look at where we are today. Working together, the state, the city of Hartford, suburban towns, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), and thousands of students have created more than 22 high-quality magnet schools that are educating thousands of children in integrated, high quality-schools.

Please remember that the state and towns are already committed to educate each of the children participating in Sheff programs. The cost to operate magnet schools is slightly higher initially, but pays off both in fulfilling our Constitutional obligations, and in producing adults and workers who can compete and perform in the workplace – and it builds the foundation needed to close Connecticut's achievement gap.

Last spring, the Governor and Commissioner of Education agreed to a carefully worked out interim 5-year settlement agreement in the Sheff v. O'Neill case. The settlement was intended to improve on the first five-year agreement, adopted in 2003, which fell short of its desegregation goal. The new agreement was adopted by the court in June of 2008, and the state was ordered to develop a Comprehensive Management Plan, which provided a step by step blueprint for expanding voluntary integration programs for Hartford schoolchildren. As part of this process, the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education submitted a budget proposal to the Office of Policy and Management in December of 2008,

specifying the additional funds that would be necessary to achieve the ambitious goals ordered in the new agreement.

Chief among these proposals were funds to adequately support magnet schools, increase per pupil payments to suburban towns for accepting Project Choice students, avoid a loss of overall ECS funding for the Hartford public schools, and raise the severely underfunded magnet school transportation budget.

The Governor's education budget stripped away all of these recommendations that the Commissioner and State Board of Education decided were necessary to fulfill the specific terms of the court's 2008 order – and the mandate of the Connecticut Supreme Court's 1996 decision.

Connecticut's voluntary, two-way program is a model in the nation. It is providing the quality, integrated education our children need to compete and close the achievement gap.

The Sheff budget recommendations adopted by the State Board of Education and submitted to OPM and the Governor in December need to be restored in the final budget. This includes, for the magnet schools:

- A \$13,054 per pupil payment for non-resident students in city based "Host Magnets"
- No reduction in the city's ECS payment for Hartford students attending magnet schools
- A \$10,443 per pupil payment for students attending magnet schools run by the Regional Education Service Centers (such as CREC in Hartford)
- An increase in magnet school transportation funding to \$2500 per pupil in 2009-10, and \$3000 per pupil in 2010-11.
- continuation of the magnet school construction bonus to provide incentives for all school districts to create racially and economically diverse schools

For the Project Choice program, the original December proposal from the Commission of Education would:

- Increase the per pupil payment to suburban districts from \$2500 per pupil to a more reasonable level – ranging up to \$7000 per pupil, depending on the number of city students served and the budget year.
- Continue the strong education and intervention supports for students provided by CREC staff for the Project Choice program, and expand the successful "Early Beginnings" program for preschoolers.

One more point about the Project Choice program needs to be mentioned. The Governor's Budget also proposes effectively dismantling the existing successful Project Choice program by moving all of its functions from CREC to the State Department of Education. We don't

know where this idea came from, but the proposal would be highly destructive, and would not save the state any money in the long run. The current Choice program at CREC, which includes a strong staff of educational and intervention specialists, has made tremendous gains in recent years and is trusted by both parents and by suburban towns. At a time when the state needs to rapidly expand the Project Choice program, it makes absolutely no sense to dismantle the staff and programs that have made the program a success.

In conclusion, the remedy in *Sheff v. O'Neill* is working, and it is growing slowly but surely. This year, 19% of Hartford minority school children are in schools that are at or near the desegregation goal.¹ Next year the goal will be 27%, more than a quarter of Hartford's school-aged children. And the numbers are required to continue to grow after that. I don't see how we can continue to make this kind of progress without the funding that the Commissioner and State Board decided were necessary to implement the *Sheff* plan. At the same time, we have to maintain the current levels of ECS funding for the Hartford Public Schools overall, so that Hartford can be a full partner in this process.

This Committee and the General Assembly share a constitutional duty with the Governor and the State Board of Education to affirm the rights of Hartford schoolchildren to a quality, integrated education. We are showing Connecticut and the nation that voluntary school integration can succeed, that children can come together and learn: rich and poor, Black, White, Latino and Asian, in the same shared schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For further details on the new *Sheff* settlement, the Commissioner's proposed December budget, and research on the benefits of racial and economic integration, go to our website at www.sheffmovement.org.

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¹ The 19% and 27% annual goals each include a 3% setaside counting children who are attending part-time programs (such as sister school programs, etc) – thus the percentage goal for children in regular attendance at schools that meet the integration standard is 16% in 2008-09 and 24% in 2009-10.