

February 20, 2009

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Jaya Vijayasekar and as president of the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers, I am honored to represent the 671 world language teachers in our state. My testimony is in support of proposed Bill #945, an Act Concerning World Language Requirements.

The Committee for Economic Development has declared that "in order to confront the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to enhance **the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students.**" The U.S. will become **less competitive** due to the deficit in strong foreign language programs. According to Kyra Nesteriak of CBIA, **1200** foreign owned companies have chosen to invest in Connecticut; they employ our citizens, set up operations and pay taxes here.

The World Affairs Council held a Roundtable discussion on K-18 International Readiness on February 6th at the Legislative Office Building. The resounding message from this distinguished panel was that language learning is critical to have our students compete in this increasingly global economy and that our educational efforts need to focus on the need for a plan to prepare Connecticut's workforce for the global marketplace (<http://www.ctn.state.ct.us/ondemand.asp?dir=W>)

Beyond this critical need is the longtime necessity to bridge the equity gap in our curricular offerings among the various school districts. While two thirds of our students may already be enrolled in a language program, we must not neglect the one third of our student population which is not engaged in world language learning and is therefore deprived of the above mentioned benefits. Furthermore, since most institutions of higher education recommend or require language study as a pre-requisite for admission, we will deprive students in our large city schools of opportunities beyond high school graduation.

The proposed Bill #945 speaks directly to a need in our state: to prepare our students and our young adults to function in a highly globalized economy with confidence and ease. The case for the study of language and culture is clear and defined! Besides the research based findings that language study increases performance on standardized tests, improved English language arts and math scores, and overall increased cognitive skills, (Cooper's study in 1987 and Garfunkel and Tabor's in 1991) here are a few of the many additional benefits:

- Ability to think through the lens of another culture
- Ability to function with ease in another country
- Ability to expand one's thought processes
- Ability to find solutions to common problems in the area of energy source and conservation
- Ability to co-exist in peace through global understanding

Through the use of expanding technology our digital natives of today are eager to connect with their counterparts all over the world. Language learning is a natural conduit to facilitate this connection.

During the past 24 years of service in the Connecticut public schools, I have had the privilege to connect with students and help them appreciate the linguistic and cultural experiences that are an integral part of a language curriculum. To help students become "international minded" and embrace the differences among languages and cultures are the ultimate goals of the world language classroom. Several of my students have indeed decided to major in world languages and intend to teach in the near future. One of the unique experiences many of these students had in high school was an opportunity to teach the target language to elementary school students. As members of the "Discover Languages Committee" at Rockville High School in Vernon, they planned and taught lessons in French or Spanish to third, fourth, and fifth graders in our district. Three of our students presented a workshop on this program to our language teachers at our annual COLT Fall Conference in 2006. We are proud to grow our own in Vernon and in Connecticut.

My daughter has been studying Spanish for the past 9 years and cannot understand how it could be any different for children in other districts. She prides herself on honing her language skills through music, dance, and participation in the exchange program. At the regional world language conference in New York City, the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, she participated in the "Many Views of Diversity" panel discussion. As learning other languages boosts one's confidence, she co-taught our native language of Tamil at this venue.

In closing, I would like to applaud the committee for raising this bill requiring all students to engage in a minimum of two years of language study.

Research presented by the Center for Applied Linguistics cites studies which prove that apart from an early start and a well articulated program, a **STRONG** policy in support of language instruction is the most influential factor in creating and sustaining language programs. In all European countries, at least one foreign language is compulsory. Implementing a requirement will foster a rigorous approach to curriculum development, professional development, and assessment, provide a superior education for our 21st century learners and promote greater cultural understanding.

Thank you in advance for your support of this important educational issue.

Sincerely,

Jaya Vijayasekar