

March 9, 2009

State of Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Diana Colcord and I am here to speak on behalf of SB1015, an Act Concerning Members of a Board of Education. I am in strong support of this legislation since it will allow towns in Connecticut to determine their own method for nominating candidates for Boards of Education.

In 2005 after a few years of time-intensive educational activism in Guilford I decided to run for a four-year Board of Education seat. I won my party's nomination through their interview process and quickly learned all the ins and outs of campaigning. There were some interesting dynamics that year, including two mid-term resigned seats that had to be filled first and a candidate that was not forwarded by the nominating committee but won the caucus. I teamed up with a strong incumbent running mate and was encouraged to form a PAC so that we could raise funds outside of general party funds in order to win our seats, as we were both fully invested in having a meaningful impact on Guilford's schools.

Through the PAC, we raised about \$8000, which at the time was near the total the town committee raised and spent on all its party candidates. Our money came the hard way, in \$20 increments, and required multiple fundraising efforts. But more than money, I hit the streets. Since I had only been in town a few years, I needed to meet lots of people and knocked on almost 600 doors to meet my neighbors. I attended neighborhood coffees and managed an army of volunteers. We had a phone bank. Starting at 4am on the day of the Guilford Fair Parade, we blew up and distributed 500 balloons on the Guilford Green. All the while, maintaining my day job and raising a young family.

Our campaign drew so much attention that voter turnout exceeded previous years. People were energized about education and came out to vote. On election night I was the third highest voter-getter in town, for all offices. People believed in the platform and the votes poured in. But excitement turned to tears when I learned that since my party's two, two-year seat candidates won their spots which were required by law to be filled first, there was only one seat left for a four-year candidate. That spot went to the town's top vote-getter, the individual who won the party's nomination at caucus, a member of my own party. So after working so hard to understand the issues, deliver the message and earn the votes, I wasn't seated. I had earned more votes than 8 of the 9 BOE members that year. I can imagine that would be a worst case scenario for you too, with your personal understandings of the hard work it takes to run a campaign....and think how hard it would be if you were new to your town, like I was in Guilford. The process is flawed. Our laws are not serving our communities well when our top vote getters for Boards of Education are not being seated.

Now you're bound to get naysayer's about this legislation. BOE members will tell you that of course politics doesn't belong on a BOE but that they need the parties to cultivate candidates. Let's be clear....I did not come from a political party; I came from the community at-large as a parent with a strong interest in educational excellence. And with the CT PTA behind this bill,

there is an independent body that will provide outreach to potential candidates. The BOE naysayer's will also tell you that they don't vote along party lines. So then why have parties?

Does party affiliation help build stronger school districts or does it help political parties gain control of boards and commissions? Does being a Democrat, Republican or Independent better serve the children of a town? Or does being a strong advocate for education, regardless of party affiliation, better fill the need in a small-town local election? The bottom line is that this legislation spares our children the business of politics.

I urge you to do right by our children and support SB1015. This bill merely opens the law to allow towns to make a charter change allowing for non-partisan Boards of Education.....if they choose. Democracy is about choice; please give our towns that opportunity.

Respectfully,

Diana Colcord
25 Elizabeth Street
Guilford, CT 06437
203-453-0580