

**Public Testimony
S.B. 1015
March 9, 2009
LOB, room 2B**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of SB1015, an Act Concerning Members of a Board of Education. And thank you to Senator Meyer for introducing this legislation. My name is Lisa Fiala. I am a mom with 3 kids in the public school system, I work as a licensed clinical social worker in an elementary school based health center, and I am the President of the Guilford PTA. I am here this afternoon to express strong support for SB1015, legislation that, if signed into law, will allow municipalities to determine their own method for nominating candidates for Boards of Education. I believe that partisan politics has no place on a Board of Education, and it is time to open the law so non-partisan nomination processes may take place if towns so choose.

Research by the Westport League of Women Voters and the Connecticut PTA back in the 1980's has shown that nationwide 86% of Boards of Education are non-partisan. Connecticut is one of the few states that still has partisan Boards of Education. I've never been one to subscribe to a "monkey-see, monkey-do" philosophy, but I do believe that adopting best practices, and learning from our neighbors, are good things. It's time to put the interest of Connecticut's children first over politics by eliminating politics from our boards of education.

A byproduct of partisanship on boards of education is the minority/majority rule that has prevented highly desirable candidates from being seated on a board of education. I saw this first hand in Guilford in 2005 when two phenomenal candidates were not seated despite receiving the second and third highest votes of all the BOE candidates. The second to lowest vote getter, however, was seated - not because she was "wanted" but because the majority rule dictated that a member of her political party must take that seat.

SB1015 does not mandate towns change any charters or processes. It merely opens the law to allow towns to make a charter change allowing for non-partisan Boards of Education *if they so choose*. It becomes a choice. Some towns with bi-partisan cooperation may choose not to make a change. Other towns that struggle with partisan behavior and politics on their Board of Education may advocate for change. SB1015 would allow either to occur. Additionally, and importantly given the current economic climate, this is cost-free legislation.

I wish I could eloquently and fully tell you how important having this option would be for my town, and for many other towns as well, I'm sure. Partisan behaviors occur on boards of education. Members of a board of education need to put the interest of the students above political ideologies, agendas, and party pressures. I have heard that an education board needs to have a balance of political ideologies; my thinking is that a BOE needs to have a balance of intelligence, critical thinking, passion, commitment, energy, advocacy, and interest. These are innate qualities that are not driven by, derived from, or a product of political parties.

I thank you for your time, and consideration of this important bill, and respectfully request this bill be reported favorably and moved along the continuum toward becoming law. Thank you.

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