

Literacy Advocates

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Testimony to the Education Committee in Opposition to Raised Bill No. 1142
AAC RELIEF OF STATE MANDATES ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

My name is Sheryl Knapp. I am a Literacy Consultant, employed by both local parents and school districts, and serve on the Board of Directors of both the Connecticut Down Syndrome Congress (CDSC) and the Connecticut Branch of the International Dyslexia Association (CONNIDA). I am also the parent of an elementary-aged student with Down syndrome. Please accept this letter as testimony **AGAINST** Sections 4 and 5 of Raised Bill No. 1142, *AAC RELIEF OF STATE MANDATES ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS*.

Section 4 (BURDEN OF PROOF):

Section 4 places an onerous burden on parents who are forced to request a Hearing by the State Department of Education in order to obtain a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for their child. These parents are already at an unfair advantage as the district not only possesses the information upon which decisions are made, but also the resources to retain high-powered legal representation. Due to this inherent imbalance of power, it is essential that Connecticut keep the burden of proof on the school district. The courts and the Constitution already dictate where the burden of proof lies; there is no need for the legislature to further complicate the issue – while also making the process even more difficult for parents, particularly those who cannot afford legal representation.

Section 5 (TERMINATION OF SERVICES AT AGE 21):

Currently, students with the most significant disabilities residing in Connecticut – a very small percentage of students who receive special education services – are permitted to continue the academic year in which they reach age 21. Allowing this small but extremely vulnerable group of students to finish their education until the traditional month of June, during the year they turn 21, provides them with an orderly transition to adult support services which typically run concurrent with the school year, from September through June. Section 5 would terminate such school services for students upon their twenty-first birthday – regardless of where that birthday falls in the calendar year. This would create an undue and unnecessary hardship for the students and their families, as it would not only disrupt the current school program in progress, but also force many students to wait until September to resume transitional services. Moreover, planning would be impossible if each student was dropped from said programs at arbitrary times during the year. Please do NOT change the language of the general statutes as proposed in Section 5.

Please do not change the current regulations in Connecticut in connection with burden of proof and when special education services end. I urge you to defeat Raised Bill No. 1142 in committee. Thank you very much for your consideration.