

Testimony
Submitted to the
Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2009

GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S
RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

Good afternoon Senator Harp and Representative Geragosian, and fellow members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Richard Kisiel and I am superintendent of the Avon Public Schools. I am here to ask the State of Connecticut to fully fund the cost of magnet school tuitions. I'm also asking you to support the commissioner of education's request to increase the subsidy that suburban districts receive for accepting urban students through the Open Choice program. The current level of state funding is not adequate to fulfill the constitutional, moral, and social obligations to the children of the Greater Hartford region.

The Town of Avon was not a party in the Sheff v. O'Neill desegregation case. Yet, taxpayers have supported the effort to desegregate Hartford Public Schools. We have paid the tuition for students to participate in regional magnet school programs and we have enrolled Hartford children through the Open Choice program - even when our community was experiencing a fifty percent increase in enrollment, facing tight budgets, and receiving little or no support from the state for these programs.

These tuition expenses are now cutting into our existing programs and services. The funds that we receive through Choice can no longer support the costs for tuition in magnet schools. Under the governor's budget, the suburban towns will be asked to educate Hartford children and be paid less than ¼ of what it takes to educate a child in the state. Last week, the Hartford Public Schools notified superintendents that it will expect suburban school districts to pay in excess of \$4,000 for each child that attends a city magnet school. Our frustration is simple. We have no control over the number of students who can attend magnet schools, we have no control over the tuition cost, and we simply can no longer afford the additional cost.

All districts in the state are trying to maintain the instructional integrity and program quality in their schools in a cost effective manner while remaining sensitive and responsive to the current fiscal conditions. I am fearful, however, that major budget reductions, resulting in staffing and program reductions, will threaten the voluntary efforts of socially conscious school districts to support the goal of encouraging children to cross district lines to reduce the racially isolated schools. And, if we are forced to enroll students in magnet schools and even take on more Choice students, I don't know how we would balance our budget and get support from our communities to send more tax dollars to the state to finance the Sheff II Stipulated Order.

If the state is serious about improving the quality of education and seeking more opportunities for children to attend more mixed income and non-racially isolated schools, and if the state is serious about resolving this constitutional and equity issue, then it must take responsibility for fully funding this effort.

Thank you for your time.