

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, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), representing the 35 school districts in the Capitol Region.

I am testifying today on Governor's Bill 830, An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education, with endorsements from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

It is with disappointment and trepidation that I write to express my concern regarding the omission of Commissioner Mark McQuillan's proposed funding for the Sheff II Stipulated Order in the administration's budget submitted to the General Assembly on February 4. This funding is essential for the implementation of the Sheff Comprehensive Management Plan; the first strategic plan to meet the benchmarks agreed upon by the State of Connecticut. The current level of funding is certainly inadequate to fulfill the conditions of the negotiated agreement and will result in another failure on the part of the State to meet its constitutional obligations on behalf of the children in the Greater Hartford region and throughout Connecticut.

Over the past 10 years despite three magnet school funding task forces enacted by the General Assembly and Office of Policy and Management and numerous solutions proposed by the SDE that have gone unfunded, the State continues to fail to meet every agreed upon benchmark in the previous Stipulated Orders. A voluntary effort by socially conscious school districts and communities that relied on the good government to establish a sound funding mechanism to insure continuity and stability for Open Choice and magnet schools has begun to flounder as school districts find themselves pitted against one another and the State. The state has transformed a voluntary effort into an unfunded mandate at a time when urban and suburban school districts throughout Connecticut cannot

continue to find the financial resources to meet the obligations for their own schools much less magnet schools and the acceptance of large numbers of open choice students.

As the Hartford Public Schools and all urban school districts continue to make great improvement in student achievement, reduce dropout rates, and increase the number of students attending college, they have been strapped with a burdensome tax that threatens to dismantle their long awaited success. Never in my 40 years as an educator have I seen the Hartford Public Schools so close to improving the opportunities for all children then now. The great costs for magnet school tuitions are an overwhelming threat to that continued success and that of all of the school districts paying for students to attend magnet schools.

Certainly, all of us serving the general welfare of our state and communities have a moral and constitutional obligation to work in a bipartisan manner to provide an equal opportunity for high quality education for our children. I encourage you to work with the General Assembly to enact legislation in which the State of Connecticut will assume the full cost of funding magnet schools state-wide and to accept Commissioner McQuillan's proposal to increase Open Choice funding. Given the compounding impact of the Stipulated Order to meet the 2013 goals and legislation allowing all of Connecticut's students to apply to magnet schools, school districts will be called upon to pay tuition costs for many more students in the next four years and to accept many more open choice students throughout the Capitol Region. Now is the time to act on this in that next year will be too late, and our school districts will be saddled with yet another unfunded mandate with unmanageable costs.