

Testimony

Submitted to the

Education Committee

March 9, 2009

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

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Cal Heminway. I am Chairman of the Granby Board of Education, serve on the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), representing the 35 school districts in the Capitol Region, and am President of The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE).

I would like to start by reiterating a plea made in an earlier hearing of the Appropriations Committee that the Legislature not cut aid to municipalities in the upcoming biennial budget. Such a legislative leadership and commitment would still result in the need for significant economies and program adjustments at the local level in virtually every community in Connecticut. To merely transfer the onus for raising taxes from income and sales sources to the local property tax does not address a solution at the State level and certainly not in local communities.

Most Connecticut school districts have been challenged for operating resources for at least the past three or four years, well in advance of the State's recently surfaced revenue woes. As a result, our students and teachers have been for some time experiencing increased class sizes and a reduction through teacher and staff layoffs of the human resources needed to ensure student success. A good example can be found in the devastation caused in our neediest districts when the Early Reading Success grant was not funded for this fiscal year. We cannot be expected to meet the demands made by NCLB, our own students and parents, and Connecticut's business community absent deployable operating dollars.

The \$21 plus Million initial cost of the Sheff settlement must be addressed with funding demanded by the settlement and agreed by the Legislature. The Governor and the Legislature can no longer ignore this challenge with the wish that towns will continue the shoulder the increasing expense of operations. The aggressive targets set by the court would be difficult to achieve in the best of fiscal times. Also, the per pupil Choice stipend and transportation grants are inadequate considering the actual expense being incurred and certainly provide no incentive for non participating districts to join or current participants to increase their levels.

To mandate participation, whether or not adequate funding becomes available, would, in my mind, be a serious mistake, especially in today's environment.

My eldest daughter graduated from high school in 1979 together with classmates enrolled in Project Concern – well in advance of the Sheff versus O’Neil lawsuit. Like many other participating Hartford suburban towns, Granby saw value to both students and our society as a whole through our voluntary involvement. We have continued to participate over the years, treating our Choice kids as, properly, our students with the same high expectations. We hope to continue despite fiscal constraints. Equal treatment demands access to after school and athletic programs and opportunities for parents to participate. As well some students may need specialized support to aid in the process of acclimatization to a strange and different environment. Existing funding levels do not permit this.

Having sat on two legislative task forces directed to offer a magnet school funding formula, I can state with some authority that, if anything, things have gotten much worse over the years. Whether Host or Inter district format, the formulae set parent against district, host district against suburban district, and demand constant funding discussions between RESC and district management with state agencies. Magnet schools are a child of the Legislature, largely in response to Sheff, and designed to help reduce racial and economic isolation while making new choices available to students. The multiple formulae present confusing, inconsistent, and conflicting approaches.

Parent choice for magnets is not an idea that we oppose in concept. What we don’t like is the arbitrary nature with respect to funding. The simple and fair answer is for the State of Connecticut to fund 100% of magnet school tuitions.

Connecticut’s voluntary approach works. We just need to step up and pay for it!

Thank you for your time and attention.