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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 278: AN ACT TO REDUCE TRUANCY

MARCH 1, 2010

This testimony is submitted in favor of Bill 278, which would require the State Department of Education to define "excused" and "unexcused" absences, and also would require the reporting of truancy data and programs to the Governor and General Assembly.

My name is Joe Vaverchak, District Supervisor of Attendance/Residency and the McKinney Vento Homeless Liaison for the Consolidated School District of New Britain, Connecticut. I am writing this testimony in support of Bill Number 278/An Act Concerning Truancy. I have worked with truant students since 1996. I have been involved in attendance/truancy committees since 1998 starting with The State of Connecticut Task Force on Truancy. Following this, I co-chaired the Governor's Prevention Program on Truancy. Our district is a member of the Consortium on School Attendance coordinated by the Office of Policy and Management. Recently I have been part of the Families with Service Needs Advisory Board co-chaired by Martha Stone and Preston Britner. This board has worked diligently in proposing new legislation in the area of truancy.

I believe that diverting truant children from juvenile court is very important and diversions should be put in place. In order to enforce these diversions, school districts should be held accountable to attempt and implement meetings with parents/truancy programs and involving their communities in the ongoing effort to improve attendance and divert these children from court. I believe there should be a timeline in which schools should be filing a FWSN Referral. If there is no cooperation of parents determined by the school, action should be taken. Early intervention in these cases is key.

Since my involvement with truancy work, the biggest issue that has been discussed on each committee has been getting a universal definition on excused and unexcused absences. I feel this is very important. Each school district creates their own definitions and this could cause questions for parents especially with the high rate of mobility in a lot of our districts. Also it is hard to compare truancy rates among districts if the definitions are not uniformed. I truly believe though, if this definition is to come to fruition it would be helpful if the State Department of Education would collaborate with the state-wide Consortium on School Attendance and also possibly school districts who have created and implemented solid truancy programs.

In conclusion, I do feel strongly that each district should be reporting their truancy data and truancy programs to the State Department of Education. This data then should be forwarded on to the Governor and General Assembly. Our state-wide consortium consists of 25 school districts. To my knowledge there are 174 school districts in the state of Connecticut. With the major impact that truancy imposes, I strongly believe that we need to be aware of what is actually occurring in the area of truancy in these districts. Truancy is not only an urban school district problem it is a state wide problem and needs to be addressed as such.

Respectfully submitted.

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