

TESTIMONY TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE

TRANSPORTATION

BY BRUCE E. DOUGLAS, Ph.D.

GOOD AFTERNOON:

MY NAME IS BRUCE DOUGLAS. I AM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL (CREC). CREC IS A REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER, OR RESC.

I AM HERE TO SPEAK IN OPPOSITION TO BILL S.B. 280, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION, WHICH IS QUITE OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO KEEP RESCS OUT OF THE SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION BUSINESS.

I SPEAK TODAY ON BEHALF OF CONNECTICUT RESC ALLIANCE. CONNECTICUT'S REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS WERE ESTABLISHED OVER 40 YEARS AGO FOR THE PURPOSE OF "COOPERATIVE ACTION TO FURNISH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES" TO LOCAL AND REGIONAL BOARDS OF EDUCATION. STATE STATUTES ENCOURAGE THE..."USE OF RESCS FOR THE PROVISION OF GOODS AND SERVICES FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL BOARDS OF EDUCATION". IN FACT, OUR ORGANIZATIONS ARE NON-PROFIT, PUBLIC-PURPOSE AGENCIES THAT ARE LITERALLY OWNED BY GROUPS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS. OUR MISSION AND HISTORY HAS BEEN TO HELP SCHOOL DISTRICTS DO MORE WITH LESS - IN

TEACHER TRAINING, COOPERATIVELY BID PURCHASING, SPECIAL ED SERVICES, TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER AREAS.

THE SEVERITY OF OUR STATE'S CURRENT BUDGETARY CRISIS UNDERSCORES THE VALUE OF THE RESC MODEL AND THE POTENTIAL THAT RESCS HAVE TO BE PART OF THE "ANSWER" IN CONTAINING SCHOOL DISTRICT COSTS.

I WISH TO ADDRESS THE PROVISION OF STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY RESCS.

RESCS, STATEWIDE AND NATIONALLY, HAVE BEEN PROVIDING STUDENT TRANSPORTATION TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS FOR MANY YEARS, DIRECTLY AND THROUGH SUBCONTRACTS WITH FOR-PROFIT VENDORS. RESCS ARE CHOSEN TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WHEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS FEEL THEY CAN DO IT BETTER, AT COMPARABLE OR LOWER COST.

WHEN A SCHOOL DISTRICT, OR A GROUP OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS, USES A RESC TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION - OR ANY OTHER SERVICE THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR ALSO PROVIDES - THAT IS SIMPLY AN EXAMPLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR USING ITS OWN RESOURCES TO FILL A NEED IN THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY.

WE ARE SURPRISED THAT SOME FOR-PROFIT BUS COMPANIES DO NOT SEEM TO ACCEPT THE IDEA THAT THEIR CHALLENGE - AS SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO WISH

TO PRIVATIZE STUDENT TRANSPORTATION - IS TO COMPETE IN EVERY INSTANCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S "IN-HOUSE" PREROGATIVES - WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S USE OF A RESC FOR ANY SERVICE ENTAILS.

AS WE UNDERSTAND THIS BILL'S LOGIC, CERTAIN, BUT NOT ALL, SERVICES, SHOULD RESERVED FOR PROFIT-ORIENTED COMPANIES BECAUSE THIS IS SOMEHOW BETTER FOR THE ECONOMY. WE CONTEND THAT IT IS NOT GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY FOR GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES TO BE STATUTORILY FORCED TO PAY MORE BY CONTRACTING FOR PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES WHEN THOSE SERVICES CAN BE PROVIDED BY EXISTING, PROVEN, PUBLIC ENTITIES, SUCH AS RESCS.

THE PUBLIC PURPOSE SERVED BY OUR PROVISION OF STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IS NO DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER SERVICES WE PROVIDE, NEARLY ALL OF WHICH ARE AVAILABLE IN THE PRIVATE, FOR-PROFIT MARKET.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HAVE CORRECTLY VIEWED RESC TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS AS BEING ESPECIALLY APPRECIATIVE OF THE NEEDS OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS, CHILDREN AND PARENTS. RESC DRIVERS RECEIVE EXTRAORDINARY TRAINING TO BETTER SERVE CHILDREN, BECAUSE WE HAVE THE CAPACITY AND EXPERTISE TO TRAIN THEM WELL IN NON-TECHNICAL AREAS SUCH AS STUDENT SAFETY AND BEHAVIOR

MANAGEMENT. WE DO NOT SEEK TO EARN A PROFIT THROUGH OUR PROVISION OF THESE SERVICES, BECAUSE WE ARE A PUBLIC-PURPOSE ORGANIZATION.

SINCE 2007, CREC HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE CONNECTICUT SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (COSTA), WHICH IS THE STATE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUS COMPANIES. OUR DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES CURRENTLY SERVES ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF COSTA. WE LOOK AT SCHOOL OPERATION FROM A MULTI-DISTRICT, LARGER-SCALE PERSPECTIVE. RESCS HAVE BEEN THINKING AND ACTING REGIONALLY SINCE OUR ESTABLISHMENT. WE EDUCATE REGIONALLY. WE TRAIN REGIONALLY, AND SO WE LOOK AT TRANSPORTATION REGIONALLY TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE THAT IS MORE EFFICIENT. WE BELIEVE THIS PERSPECTIVE HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT. AND WHEN CREC HAS PROVIDED REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES - AS IT DOES TODAY FOR 5,000 CHILDREN TO 148 SCHOOLS, WE DO SO WITH FOR-PROFIT, COSTA MEMBERS. OUR PLACEMENT IN THE SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION MIX OF OPTIONS HAS CREATED NOTHING BUT JOBS AND PROFIT OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR. IN FACT, CREC HAS INVESTED \$43 MILLION IN SUBCONTRACTS WITH COSTA MEMBERS SINCE 2000 AND WE PLAN TO CONTINUE TO DO SO IN EVERY INSTANCE WHERE THAT IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS WE EXIST TO SERVE.

PLEASE CONSIDER OUR PERSPECTIVE THAT THE INCLUSION OF A RESC BID AMONG OTHER PRIVATE VENDOR PROPOSALS REPRESENTS THE BEST OF BOTH

WORLDS - IT ALLOWS FOR INCREASED COMPETITION AND BETTER PRICING AND VALUE FOR DISTRICTS & TOWNS. TO PROHIBIT THE INCLUSION OF RESC COMPETITIVENESS IS, WE THINK, TO HOLD SCHOOL DISTRICTS HOSTAGE TO PRIVATE SECTOR PRICE STRUCTURES THAT NEED NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT'S COST WOULD BE IF IT JUST PERFORMED THE SERVICE "IN-HOUSE".

THE CURRENT PRESSURE ON MUNICIPALITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO WORK IN INNOVATIVE, REGIONALLY COLLABORATIVE WAYS, CREATES SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESCS - WHOSE MISSION IS TO FACILITATE THESE ARRANGEMENTS - AND PRIVATE SERVICE PROVIDERS TO DO MORE WORK TOGETHER. CREC, FOR EXAMPLE, WILL CONTINUE TO BROKER AND MANAGE MORE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WITH FOR-PROFIT TRANSPORTATION VENDORS.

RESC-PROVIDED STUDENT TRANSPORTATION IS NOT ABOUT HURTING THE ECONOMY AND CAUSING JOB LOSSES. IT IS ABOUT MAXIMIZING REGIONAL EFFICIENCIES, AND CREATING MOMENTUM FOR REGIONAL COST-SAVING APPROACHES BASED ON VALUABLE RESULTS.

IN 2011-12, TOWNS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS WILL BE FACING CUTS IN ECS UPWARDS OF 14%. I DON'T KNOW OF A SCHOOL BOARD, TOWN OR STATE AT THIS TIME OF ECONOMIC DURESS THAT CAN AFFORD TO DISREGARD HIGH-VALUE

PRICING BECAUSE IT IS PROVIDED BY A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION SUCH AS A REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER. WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO LOOK AT EVERY SERVICE THAT A RESC CAN PROVIDE, AND THAT CERTAINLY INCLUDES STUDENT TRANSPORTATION, TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN A MANNER THAT LOWERS COSTS, SERVES LEGITIMATE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DOES NOT THREATEN LEGITIMATE PRIVATE SECTOR INTERESTS.

WE HAVE BEEN DOING THAT; IT IS WHY WE WERE CREATED FOUR AND A HALF DECADES AGO - AND WE CAN DO MUCH, MUCH MORE.

THANK YOU.