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*Testimony of Representative Gerald Fox of Stamford  
Before the Education Committee on Raised Bill SB 379, An Act Concerning Vocational -  
Technical Schools.*

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, I would like to thank you for raising SB 379, *AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS*.

In this testimony, I would like to specifically address Section 1 (d) of the bill and I would like to thank the chairs for including this section. If enacted it would require the State Board of Education to have an affirmative vote before any regional vocational-technical school is closed or suspended for operations.

As you well know, operations at J.M. Wright Technical school in Stamford were suspended in late July by the Commissioner. This step was unprecedented in our vo-tech system. It was at this time that the many parents, students, teachers and public officials of lower Fairfield County who had worked to keep the school open first received notice of this decision. Students were displaced, and incoming freshman were returned to their respective school districts. The experience has been even more frustrating, however, due to the manner in which the decision to close the school was made. The suspending of the school's operations was never put to a vote before the State Board of Education until months after the decision was made and the school year had commenced.

Numerous questions and attempts to ascertain the procedure by which a school can be closed or suspended have revealed an unclear and confusing process. A written opinion by the Attorney General released last week in response to this situation expressly states that "legislation is necessary to ensure that the process for closing or suspending the operation of a technical school is open and transparent...".

I believe that any decision to close or suspend a vocational-technical school must require an up or down vote by the State Board of Education, after notice and public hearings in the community that will be impacted. As the public officials of lower Fairfield County continue to make our case for reopening of Wright Tech, our goal in the end must be to ensure that decisions around state technical schools are made in a clear and transparent manner, with an input from educators, parents, students and state officials. SB 379 would be a positive step towards that goal.

Thank you very much for this opportunity today and I urge the committee's favorable report.