

Testimony regarding Raised Bill #438

An Act Concerning Charter Schools & Open Choice Program Funding

I am Cal Heminway, chair of the Granby Board of Education. I am also a member of the CREC governing Council, member of the Connecticut Coalition for Fiscal Responsibility, and have held a number of leadership positions on the CAFE board of directors. I would like to offer brief remarks regarding some aspects of the proposed legislation as it applies to suburban district participation in the Choice program.

I have been a local board member for over 28 years. Granby was a participant in Project Concern over its life and now enjoys the highest Choice percentage participation of any district in Connecticut. We in Granby understand something of the impact of Choice participation upon suburban districts.

My community has not been engaged in the Open Choice program for the money! While it helps, the \$2,500 per pupil stipend does not come even close to covering our costs many of which are peculiar to our Open Choice kids. Consider the following extraordinary expense associated with Choice participation:

- A greater proportion of Choice students entering the kindergarten year are likely to be younger than their suburban peers. Therefore, in many cases the social adjustment can be greater necessitating greater support interventions from staff
- In those districts now offering half day kindergarten programs and which desire to take Choice students in that year, supplemental meal and program arrangements must be funded and made.
- With the advent of the Legislature's introduction of parent choice provisions in Connecticut's magnet school admissions process four years ago, local districts lost the capacity to fully budget for out of district placements. Many districts utilize a portion of their Choice revenues to fund tuitions, many of which cannot be forecasted or managed.
- Success of Choice demands that suburban districts provide all their students equal access to all of the programs that they offer including athletics and the range of after school enrichment activities. Our parents volunteer to have Choice kids join their families as additional members, these logistics including extraordinary transportation and meals cost money.
- A reality of today's society is that students come into our systems with cognitive and social issues. This is especially true of those entering in the intermediate and upper grades. Student success demands that these issues be addressed and eliminated as soon as possible after they are identified.
- We have determined that the extraordinary needs of a small number of Choice students widely spread across grades may be handled within existing resources. However, once a critical mass of support need is created, local support staff must be expanded if appropriate services are to be provided across the entire student population.

All of these things cost money which local districts increasingly lack for application to support the indigenous population.

Those school districts involved with the Sheff settlement and Open Choice voluntarily contributed mightily to the 27% target that was achieved. It is well past time for the Legislature meet its obligations by taking the modest steps for funding Open Choice delineated in the proposed legislation.

Cal Heminway, BOE Chair, Granby
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