

**Education Committee  
March 8, 2010**

**Testimony of Patricia Ciccone  
Superintendent of the Connecticut Technical High School System**

**ON**

**Raised Bill 379: ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS**

As the superintendent of the Connecticut Technical High School System, I have a number of concerns about Raised Bill 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools, especially as they relate to the implementation phase of several of the provisions. While we understand and appreciate the General Assembly's concern for the status of our school system, there are a number of provisions in this bill that are borne out of misunderstandings and I would like to point those out as it is my hope that this proposal will help our struggling school system. To be clear, there is continuous communications with the schools throughout the budget process and central office has numerous opportunities throughout the fiscal year to weigh in on the Department of Education's biennium and mid-term budget requests. And with that, the struggle that the school system is currently facing is less relative to the agency's budgeting process, and more related to our ongoing efforts to surmount the fiscal crisis the state is facing which has resulted in numerous budget cuts, and a serious lack of bonding.

While we have some serious concerns with specific bill provisions, there are some provisions in this bill which we support and some we could support with some modifications to the proposed language. As the Commissioner indicated in his testimony, the proposal to require the State Board of Education's authority to take a formal vote before closing or suspending operations of a school is reasonable, as is the proposal to revise the composition of the Board to reflect a greater representation of the trades on the Board membership. While I support efforts in this bill to improve the safety of our bus fleet by mandating the removal of buses after 10 years of service, I'm concerned that doing so could result in a waste of resources if the buses are still functioning safely. In addition, we have concerns about being required to remove buses from the road without any guarantee that funds will be available to replace those buses.

From our perspective of always trying to reduce operating costs, I support the proposal to allow the technical high schools to purchase supplies or contractual services from local businesses rather than through Department of Administrative Services (DAS) exclusively. However, as noted in the public forum, I am very concerned about additional burdens on principals, department heads and teachers to create, and manage budget processes as is implied in the provision that would require each school to submit a request to DAS for all supplies, materials and contractual services for the full school year. This provision could place a huge administrative burden on our schools and it is not

feasible to predict all of the school system's needs, especially in the area of contractual services, twelve months in advance.

I have delineated our specific recommendations for the provisions in this bill in the written testimony that is being submitted (below). With all of that being said, however, the Department and I welcome the opportunity to work with the co-chairs of the Education Committee as well as the Office of Policy and Management to address some of the critical dilemmas facing the technical high school system at this difficult time.

### *Recommendations*

#### Sections 1 & 2

As the Commissioner mentioned in his testimony, we believe Sections 1 and 2 of this bill have merit, although we would need to work out how Section 2 would be implemented given the current composition of the Board and the terms that members are currently serving.

#### Section 3

We support the concepts raised in Section 3 of this bill which require, in part, that on an annual basis the Education, Higher Education, and Labor Committees meet with the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), the superintendent of the technical high schools, the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, the Labor Commissioner and such other persons as they deem appropriate to discuss a variety of issues related to the technical high school system. I recommend that the Commissioner be included as a party who would participate in this discussion as well. In addition, we recommend, in the new subdivision 2 of subsection b of Section 3 of the bill, that the bill require that the Commissioner submit such information to the Committees of cognizance—not the superintendent.

While we support the concept of an annual meeting with all of the stakeholders named above, we are concerned that the reporting requirements placed on OPM, the Office of Workforce Competitiveness and the Labor Commissioner are duplicative and unnecessary given that the majority of the information that they are required to collect, will need to come from the technical high school system directly.

#### Section 5

Section 5 of this bill requires that the State Board of Education arrange, on an annual basis, for the inspection of those school busses in operation in the regional vocational-technical school system. We support this concept but we recommend that the Commissioner be assigned the task to arrange such inspections. The State Board only meets once a month and it would be an administrative burden on the agency to have to work through the Board on such a process.

## Section 6

Section 6 of this bill requires the State Board of Education to replace any school bus that is ten years or older and is in service at any regional vocational-technical school. While I support this concept, I am concerned about the consequences to the school system and its students if a bus is required to be removed from service and there are no budget funds available to replace that bus. In addition, the language as written provides for no opportunity to repair a bus that could still be operating safely, which could lead to a waste of resources. This proposal as written could lead to a shortage of buses in the technical high school system.

Part (b) of Section 6 of this bill requires the technical high school system to submit a report to OPM and the General Assembly on the replacement of school buses in service in the regional vocational-technical school system. I recommend that this provision be amended so that the Commissioner of Education is required to submit the superintendent's report

## Section 7

We oppose Section 7 of the bill which requires the technical high school system to be a separate budgeted agency from the Department of Education. We recognize that there is concern at the General Assembly about the budgeting process of the technical high school system but we also believe that there has been some misunderstanding about how the budgeting process for the technical high schools occurs. CTHSS has every opportunity to weigh in to the State Board of Education about its budgeting requires. The individual schools have the opportunity to weigh in as well.

## Section 8

Section 8 of the bill requires the Department to submit to OPM, OFA, and the committees of cognizance at the General Assembly, the operating budget and expenses for each individual technical high school. We are happy to share this information on a biannual basis but the language should be revised to require the Commissioner to submit the superintendent's information.

## Section 9

Subsection (a) of Section 9 of the bill appears to require that the technical high school system obtain quotes from both local suppliers and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) when purchasing supplies, equipments and contractual services. I support this concept as we encourage all of our schools to make efforts to take every opportunity to reduce costs. However, it is unclear from the language as written what flexibility this provision is providing the technical high school system and additional discussion on the intent of this provision would be required.

We oppose part (b) of section 9 of the bill as it will be a huge burden on our schools. It is nearly impossible for a school system to anticipate a year's worth of goods

in advance, especially when it comes to contractual services to provide repairs or technical assistance to our schools.