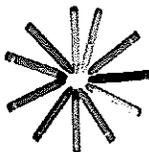


**Sheff Movement**



**Quality Integrated Education for All Children**

Good Morning Chairwoman Stillman, Chairman Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Jessica Leake. I am the Outreach Coordinator for the Sheff Movement coalition and I am here to testify in support of H.B. 6385 "An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendation of the Governor Concerning Education". Specifically, I want to speak on behalf of increasing the per pupil payments to receiving towns in Open Choice.

In my work with the Sheff Movement coalition I have had the opportunity to talk to students, parents and guardians, educators, administrators, and other staff in the Open Choice program. Many of our supporters are here today – and several magnet and Choice parents and other members of our coalition have submitted written testimony to the Committee. All of the interactions I have had with the Choice program make me confident that increasing the amount of money suburban towns receive will improve the Open Choice program by opening additional seats and allowing receiving towns to support incoming students better. The payment receiving towns currently get under Open Choice has not changed in almost 20 years.

Additionally, increasing Open Choice funding in proportion to the rate of a town's participation in the Open Choice program will go a long way to incentivizing towns to increase the number of new seats they offer. Many administrators have indicated that they could open more seats if the Open Choice funding approached the amount it costs to educate a child. Currently the Open Choice program does not offer nearly as many seats as the magnet schools do. Increasing the funding and incentivizing increased participation would begin to change that.

Finally, increasing payment to receiving towns is a cost effective way for the State of Connecticut to meet the Sheff goals during the current fiscal crisis. By more fairly reimbursing receiving Open Choice towns, the State can increase the number of students being educated in an integrated setting. At the same time, we support the state's continuing support for magnet school operating funds, as we continue to expand the number of children with access to a quality, integrated education.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will support H.B. 6385.

Sincerely,  
Jessica Leake, Outreach Coordinator; Sheff Movement coalition