

Regional School District No. 8

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Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee

My name is Robert Siminski. I am the Superintendent of Schools in Regional School District No. 8. I was also Superintendent of Schools in Thompson. Early in my career, I was the Director of Education in the Rhode Island State Prison and the State Prison in Trenton New Jersey. During my tenure as the Director of Education in the prisons, I spend a great deal of time with young males of all races and colors, who had bad experiences in K-12 education. Upon my return to K-12 education, my goal was to provide programming that met the needs of individual students in a way and at a time that would ensure their success.

At Regional School District No. 8 I feel we have such a program. Our Evening Diploma Program allows students who are having difficulty coping with the regular high school environment to succeed. Our program operates from 2:30 to 5:50 PM. The courses are taught by certified teachers, and a guidance counselor is the Director of the program. She also provides counseling and guidance services to the students. The curriculum for the courses is based on the state curriculum frameworks, and according to the students, it prepares them for life after the program.

Students feel comfortable in the program because of their connection to the school but do not get caught up in the "drama" of the high school. The students have jobs, their attendance at work is excellent,

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and some employers have promised specialized training after the students complete their diploma program. I would like to share some of the successes of the program and some of the hopes of the students who are enrolled in the program. This year we anticipate that 11 students will receive their diplomas, not equivalency certificates, this June. In the past, 26 students received their high school diplomas. The students have gone on to technical schools, community colleges, four year college (University of Maine), nursing programs, and the world of work (one student now actually owns his own landscape business.) There are numerous stories of other students, like the young mother who would not have received her high school diploma had it not been for the evening diploma program. Currently enrolled in the program is a young man whose goal in life is to be a US Marine. The Marine Corps only accepts students who have a high school diploma.

All of the students entering the program were under the age of 18. I would urge you to consider this option when considering Bill #6585. The Evening Diploma Program should be made an option of school choice. Such an option would allow programs such as mine to meet the needs of students in a comfortable and supporting environment, that would allow them to be successful and receive a high school diploma that will help them to become productive members of society.

On behalf of the students enrolled in the Region No. 8 Evening Diploma Program and those who will follow, I thank you for your time. Again thank you for your consideration.