

Testimony on Raised Bill No. 930

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SCHOOL ENTRANCE AGE

I am William Silver, Superintendent of Schools in Killingly. As President of the Northeast Area Superintendents Association and the Chairperson of the Northeast School Readiness Council, I submit this written testimony on behalf of these organizations. I regret that I am not able to present this in person.

We oppose the proposed changes in the kindergarten entry age given the current lack of availability of state funding to support the increase in high quality preschool programs. A change in kindergarten entry age must be directly linked to increased support for high quality preschool in all towns where it is in short supply, as has been suggested by Governor Malloy, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) and the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents (CAUS).

Our poorer, rural communities reflect the challenges in the larger urban cities, where there is an insufficient number of high-quality, affordable preschool slots. The change in kindergarten entry age will keep those children out of school another year. For example, in Killingly slightly less than 70% of this year's kindergarten children had a preschool experience; some of which was not of high quality. This is quite a contrast to the percent of children entering kindergarten with preschool experience in District Reference Group A which is about 95%, in addition to the other resources and experiences afforded these children. Keeping children out of school for an additional year would increase the preparation and achievement gaps, which we are desperately trying to eliminate. In the absence of high quality preschool options for all children, especially those most at-risk for school success, we want them in our kindergarten programs.

Additionally, public schools have the obligation of serving children with identified disabilities on their 3rd birthday. Children with disabilities who enter preschool at 3 will remain in the program for three years (instead of two years) and will jeopardize the availability of inclusive programs that have been a demonstrated success. The change in kindergarten entry age would have these children in preschool with older peers and reduce the availability of preschool slots for age appropriate peers.

We support the change in mandatory school age, but propose that the mandatory school age be 5. Data provided by the CT Department of Education indicate that there

is a significant discrepancy among District Reference Groups (DRGs) regarding the ages of children which are cited below.

DRG	% of children entering K beyond the year in which they were first eligible
A	50.3
B	43.6
C	38.6
D	32.1
E	26.1
F	18.4
G	17.9
H	12.1
I	9.7

The change in mandatory school age to age 6 will do little to impact these differences. However, establishing age 5 as the entry age will eventually allow for a more equitable comparison of assessment data across DRGs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Northeast Area Superintendents Association and the Northeast School Readiness Council appreciate your serious consideration of the significant impact that these recommendations will have on our ability to reduce the preparation and achievement gaps in our communities. Please contact me at 860-779-6600 or bsilver@killinglyschools.org if you have any questions or need further clarification.