

Written Testimony  
Submitted to the  
Education Committee In Support Of

**Education Implementer bill #6502: An Act Concerning the Open Choice Program**

March 7, 2011

To Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and members of the  
Education Committee:

My name is Barbara Zuras and I am a member of the Avon Board of Education. Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony expressing my personal views.

I encourage you to enact the proposed tiered funding formula based upon participation in the Open Choice program that calls for :

- \$3,000 per student for districts allocating 1% or more of their total enrollment to Open Choice students;
- \$4,000 per student for districts allocating 2% or more; and
- \$6,000 per student for districts allocating 3% or more.

I believe that increasing the per pupil funding rate from \$2,500 to a maximum of \$6,000 will result in higher levels of participation by suburban school districts. From my perspective as a board member, increased funding would address the political and educational issues that impede our ability to more fully participate.

Our school staff is dedicated to providing excellent educational opportunities to all of our children, and our children include the 74 children who come to us through the Open Choice program. Their presence in our school community, in the words of our middle school principal, has brought "increased vitality and diversity" to our schools. Given this positive experience, our level of participation in Open Choice should be greater.

Yet, like many towns, the political reality is that we struggle in our annual budget process to secure adequate funding. Property taxes in Avon have risen significantly over the last ten years due to the construction of housing developments that have dramatically increased our school enrollment. Hiring more teachers, paying increased costs associated with retaining excellent teachers, facing unfunded mandates and building new schools are costs we cannot ignore if we are to maintain the high quality of Avon's programs. Those resulting budget increases draw the displeasure of a significant portion of our voting population. While our community remains committed to strong public education, our budgets are very tight.

In order to accept more children, we must be prepared to deal with the increased needs associated with teaching a more diverse community of students. We will need additional staff and professional development so that we can maintain a positive and inclusive learning environment for all of our children.

Further, for our Hartford students, the school day should not end at the last class bell – there must be transportation so that they can fully participate in athletics and all other school activities. Choice students must have full access to Avon's after school activities to truly feel that they are a part of our school community. Without additional funding, we can't realistically provide that access. Once Choice students become our students, we want them to be happy and successful. We want them to want to stay in Avon Schools.

I respectfully ask that you enact HB 6502 and structure a tuition plan to help school districts financially support the enrollment of more Open Choice students. I do not believe that the Crandall magnet school concept would be of assistance to our school district.

Sincerely,

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