

**Erika Haynes, Windham Town Council**  
**SB 24 Testimony**  
**Education Committee Public Hearing**  
**Wednesday, February 22, 2012**

I would like to thank Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and the members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Governor's Bill 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness. My name is Erika Haynes and I am a resident of Windham.

Section 22 of the Bill encourages regional cooperation, offering financial incentives for the development and implementation of cost-saving strategies while improving the quality of education in the district. I believe that this encourages partnerships, allows districts to maintain or increase effectiveness while becoming more efficient, and is essential to further improving our education system throughout the state. While districts may choose to work together currently, it is less common than we see in municipal governments. I strongly support this.

Section 18 of the Bill speaks to the creation of Commissioner's Network Schools. I believe this creates an opportunity for schools that continually struggle to be turned around in the most effective way possible. In Windham we are currently paving the road for this model with the creation of the Special Master role by the legislature last year. Having the Special Master in our district has provided both leadership and expertise in a way we had not previously experienced. Schools and districts that are failing are failing for a multitude of reasons. Simply imposing more and more punitive measures do not move a district to success. Identifying schools "in need of improvement" has not been successful. The Commissioner's Network allows for the introduction of effective national school models and partners to our state. Creating the Commissioner's Network partners the state and local district in a positive manner, and I believe this network is absolutely necessary in order for our state's failing schools and districts to progress.

Section 52 of the Bill identifies the opportunity to grow the network of charter schools in the state. The need for this cannot be overstated. Parents deserve the choice of high performing schools, regardless of who operates them. Windham's reform strategy depends on more students attending more good schools. In areas like Eastern and North Western Connecticut, the opportunity for regional choice through both charters and magnets is essential. I currently spend two hours a day bringing my two high school students to a CREC magnet school in Manchester. There is no school choice in Windham.

The state has focused on the creation of a network of charter schools in urban areas, and the parents and children in the less populated areas of the state have not been given the same opportunities. While I am fortunate that I am able to bring my girls to a school out of district, it is wrong that few parents in my district have that ability

and therefore that option. The design of Section 52 allows for not only districts like mine but my region as a whole to focus on the creation of additional schools designed to support the needs of our children. Students in the state should have the same opportunities, regardless of geography.

All of these proposals, as contained in the Governor's reform strategy, enable better schools for the children who need them the most.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony about the Governor's Bill 24. I urge the committee to support this bill.