

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

February 15, 2012

**H.B. No. 6357 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING
EDUCATION**

H.B. No. 6359 AN ACT CONCERNING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Good morning Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Bye, Representative McCrory, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Dr. Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). CREC provides extensive educational support services throughout the state of Connecticut and operates five highly accomplished and specialized programs for student with disabilities and 18 successful interdistrict magnet schools in the greater Hartford area.

I am testifying today on **House Bill 6357**, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education and **House Bill 6359**, An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System.

House Bill 6357 does not sufficiently define the State's obligation to cover the cost of students in magnet schools. In addition to the proposed changes to ECS, CREC urges the Committee to give our school districts much needed relief by increasing the state subsidy for magnet schools. The current funding arrangement is becoming increasingly oppressive and debilitating to our school districts. We recommend the State modify the ECS formula to account for the number of students attending magnet schools when calculating each school district's ECS grant.

This year, the Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) received almost 17,000 magnet school applications, and in the fall, approximately 20,000 students will attend CREC, Hartford Public, or other magnet schools in the Hartford area. As the number of students in the Sheff CREC magnet schools increases, so does the cost to our sending school districts. This cost has become prohibitive. As the operator of eighteen of these magnet schools, I can assure you that in future settlement agreements, given the volume of students, we will be unable to sustain these schools if we continue down this path. The early childhood funding fiasco is evidence of this challenge. We cannot replicate this situation; the state must determine a long-term strategy for funding these programs. Modifying the ECS grant to account for student enrollment in magnet schools, is a means of universally addressing this challenge.

In regards to **House Bill 6358**, CREC supports the development of a comprehensive early childhood system that is closely aligned with the State Department of Education's system of elementary and secondary education, and that holds early childhood providers to the same high standards as our public schools. We strongly believe in further financial investments in early childhood for 3, 4, and 5 year olds under public education.

Currently, CREC enrolls 3 & 4 year olds in our eight elementary magnet schools. CREC Magnet School students entering school at age 3 & 4 are predictably reading on grade level by third grade because of the quality and intensity of our academically focused early childhood programs and our system of early intervention. Furthermore, because of these programs, there is *no achievement gap* in CREC Magnet Schools at the third grade level.

To quote President Obama from his State of the Union address given Tuesday, "Every dollar we invest in high-quality early childhood education can save more than seven dollars later on, by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. In states that make it a priority to educate

our youngest children -- like Georgia or Oklahoma -- studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own.”

Given the recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau on the location of wealth in America, which shows that Connecticut continues to hold the top ranking, I was chastened by the notion that states like Georgia and Oklahoma outspend us per pupil in early childhood education. It is time we acknowledge that these investments are essential to the future strength of Connecticut’s economy and to the ongoing revitalization of our cities; and we must act urgently to provide further access to high quality early childhood experiences for our children.

Access to these opportunities, however, cannot be mandated on the backs of our school districts. In 2012, having required school districts to pay tuition for preschool students attending magnet schools since 2009 was found by the court to be unconstitutional. During the winter deficit mitigation negotiations, however, spurious legislation was passed requiring school districts to retroactively pay the tuition of these students. The resulting budgetary challenges threatened to come at a great and unanticipated cost to programs and to student learning in these school districts. There is no bigger civil rights issue, or gift, than providing equal access to early childhood for all students in Connecticut. We urge you to do the right thing, and allocate the necessary funds to cover the cost of these young learners.

We believe these bills, with consideration of our recommendations, have a chance to produce dramatic change in Connecticut’s schools and dramatic outcomes for Connecticut’s children and families.

CREC offers our guidance and support to the Committee and to the State Department of Education. Thank you for your kind consideration of our recommendations and your enduring commitment to our state.