

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

March 4, 2013

Re: HB 6504 AAC ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS
HB 6505 AAC PARAMETERS FOR FEES FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SB 997 AA ESTABLISHING AN EDUCATOR PREPARATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Good morning. My name is Dr. Karissa Niehoff. I am the Executive Director of the CT Association of Schools (CAS) which includes the CT Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC). CAS-CIAC membership includes approximately 900 public, parochial, charter and magnet schools serving students Pre-K-12 across the state. CAS is a non-profit association; our focus is school leadership. We provide an extensive range of professional development experiences and on-going support for school administrator aspirants, and those who are currently working as principals and assistant principals. The CIAC governs interscholastic athletics and student activities. I would like to comment on three bills being considered today: HB 6504, HB 6505 and SB 997.

HB 6504 AAC ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

CAS supports the intent of this bill as it provides clarity and uniformity to alternative programs and requires them to be offered by each local/regional board of education to overage/under-credited students and expelled students in accordance to statutory provisions. Defining such programs as *school* programs ties them to the requirements of boards of education to maintain good public elementary and secondary schools (page two of the bill). That language addresses supplies, staffing, technology, resources, facilities, etc.

As a former middle school assistant principal and finally high school principal, I was involved in multiple expulsion situations- anything from a 6th grade student bringing a pocket knife to school in a backpack after a weekend Boy Scout camping trip, to drug use, distribution and sales. In each case, students and families participated in a Board of Education hearing which resulted in stipulated agreements or complete removal from the school environment for 180 school days. During this time, students were typically offered 10 hours of tutoring per week. Tutors were usually certified teachers, but not specialists in a multitude of subject areas. If the board of education recommended enrollment in an alternative program, it involved transportation to other towns - often far away. Oftentimes, there were no available seats in those programs, so the preferred recommendation of the BOE could not be followed. I observed a large variance across programs regarding quality of educational experiences and communication with the home school district.

HB 6504 appropriately targets this variance. The term *school program* is stronger than *alternative program* and the word *shall* implies that all districts must offer such school programs.

HB 6505 AAC PARAMETERS FOR FEES FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The CAS-CIAC Board of Directors does not believe that students should be assessed fees for the privilege of participating in activities which have been traditionally recognized as integral and meaningful in the total school program. These activities have through the years provided immediate and long-range benefits to participants as well as to schools. At the same time, with declining resources and with cutbacks in budgets, funding these activities has become increasingly more difficult. Sports like ice hockey and football are extremely costly; user fees do very little to offset those costs. Each local Board of Education should find ways other than user fees to support extra-curricular and activities (i.e. An Athletic Booster Club supporting all programs in an equitable fashion). Requiring "pay-for-play" is a shortsighted educational policy and can be discriminatory to the needy.

The CIAC handbook includes similar position statements from CAPSS, athletic director and coaches associations, and administrators of health and physical education.

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CAS supports SB 997 and requests that a representative of CAS be added to the membership of the committee. CAS is the leading provider of professional development for principals and assistant principals and has the responsibility of training school administrators in the new evaluation guidelines and SEED model. I currently serve as a member of the existing EPAC committee and would very much appreciate having CAS continue its involvement in the EPAC work. I believe that the approval, regulation, oversight and accreditation of teacher preparation programs must be strengthened.

Thank you for your consideration. This completes my testimony.