



East Hartford Public Schools

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TESTIMONY

Education Committee

HB 6507 AN ACT CONCERNING A SLIDING TUITION SCALE FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS OFFERED AT INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

Good afternoon Representative Fleischman, Senator Stillman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Nathan Quesnel and I am the Superintendent for East Hartford Public Schools.

I am here today to express our concern regarding HB 6507, An Act Concerning A Sliding Tuition Scale For Preschool Programs Offered At Interdistrict Magnet School Programs.

I want to first express our overall support for increasing the availability of high quality pre-school experiences for all of Connecticut's children. Superintendents understand that children who have had such experiences enter school with advantages over those who have not.

Having said that, it is a reality that, at present, districts are not required to provide pre-school services; in fact, they are not even required to provide full-time kindergarten and many do not. When parents choose a magnet pre-school program, it is unfair to expect districts to pay tuition for such services that are unavailable to their students as a whole; further, payment of such tuition reduces local budgets and limits their ability to provide programming for others.

Over the past two years, the instability in the legislative opinion on this particular issue has presented several challenges for local budgets in regards to funding and predictability. Following the legal opinion last fall, our requirement "to pay or not to pay" has vacillated and held the local East Hartford budget hostage for over \$238,000. In addition, I ask that you consider the \$2.7 million of local funding from East Hartford that goes to support Magnet School tuitions. Adding in this additional pre-school financial obligation is bluntly, bankrupting the local budget.

Please note that as we continue to calculate the costs of magnet pre-school programs in the local area, this type of legislation also may have a significant impact on families and the choices they make to attend state, federal and locally subsidized Headstart and Readiness Programs. While families in East Hartford currently pay a portion of tuition based on a sliding scale for our Readiness program, the propagation of pre-school programs will present some interesting arrangements in regards to "free" and "charged" programs. This is an issue of basic equity and state investment. As you consider an incredibly important issue of educational opportunity, I urge you to consider the placement of your investment and ask that you allocate funding and legislation targeting the local districts

