

Testimony of
Monique Heller
Parent of a Talented and Gifted Child
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
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HB 5911 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHING OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

Good afternoon members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Monique Heller and I am the concerned parent of a six year old child. Her educational needs are not being met and will not be met for the foreseeable future under the current legislation. I urge you to support HB 5911 for the ultimate benefit of all the Talented and Gifted Children in Connecticut. Teacher preparation programs are a step in the right direction towards meeting those needs. I would encourage and challenge the committee to take the discussion a step further to mandate that each district report to the state what programs they are implementing for their identified Talented and Gifted students. This would enable best practices to be identified, shared, and disseminated. Further, Connecticut must identify criteria for teacher certification in Talented and Gifted education and ensure that state colleges and universities have the curriculum established in order to support the program.

In November, we were forced to pull our daughter out of public school Kindergarten and enroll her in a private school that could meet her unique academic needs and challenges. My daughter's IQ was recently measured at 137 which ranks her in the top 1% of her peers, worldwide. Further testing indicated that she was and is working at least 3-4 years beyond her same age level peers. With the exception of identifying children as "Talented and Gifted," Connecticut has turned their backs on their brightest stars while a disproportionate amount of money has been spent on disabled children and underperforming school districts. The thought process behind the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and IDEA regarding a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" should be mandated for ALL students, not just those with disabilities. A dialogue is required at the State level to discuss this issue. Forcing CT parents of Talented and Gifted children to bear the financial burden, if they are even able to do so, is both unfair and unjust.

CT General Statutes define special education as special classes, programs, or services designed to meet the needs of exceptional children. Exceptional students are those who deviate either intellectually, physically, socially, or emotionally so markedly from normal expected growth and development patterns that they are or will be unable to progress effectively in a regular school program. I feel pretty comfortable saying that my daughter qualifies as an *exceptional child* per the definition of intellectual distinction. Without knowledge of other students who may have been tested, she deviates from 99 - 99.9% of those enrolled in Kindergarten and perhaps the entire school population, which makes her fairly *atypical*. She cannot, nor should she be expected to, progress effectively in a regular school program. Connecticut needs to do a better job at helping ALL students progress. It is my strong belief that the present legislation promotes a "brain drain" since many of the talented and gifted students will end up leaving the public school system if their parents are able to afford private schools as we have been forced to do.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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